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ABSTRACT

As theories about identity have shifted over time to viewing it as a multidimensional and ever-evolving process created by social and cultural settings, conceptions of literacy and implications for classroom practices have shifted as well. This book presents studies of students in Grades 3 to 6 at three different United States school sites located in New York City and Texas where teachers implemented writing workshop and literature-based instruction. The studies in the book include examples and vignettes of real-life teachers and students who interacted in complex ways that were informed by their social and cultural influences. In the book's studies, readers can see how students' classroom participation was influenced not only by race, class, and gender, but also by classroom tasks presented to them. The book explores how students, both successfully and unsuccessfully, appropriated, resisted, or transformed the classroom norms and expectations. By providing information about the contexts in which students read and wrote, the book demonstrates the power of the teacher-student relationship, the importance of the classroom curriculum, and the influence of parents and peers on students. Contains an extensive list of references and children's literature references. (NKA)

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# Students' Identities and Literacy Learning

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*In memory of my mother*

*and to my son…*

*may the power of story continue to connect us.*

# Contents

Note From the Series Editors ix

Review Board xi

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction 1

CHAPTER 1

Situating Identity in Theory, Research, and Practice 9

CHAPTER 2

Appropriation, Resistance, and Transformation in a Writing Workshop 31

CHAPTER 3

Appropriating, Resisting, and Transforming Norms in a Literature-Based, Multiage Classroom 63

CHAPTER 4

Appropriation, Resistance, and Transformation in Reading Workshop and Reading Renaissance 87

CHAPTER 5

Understanding Students Within Their Social Contexts 107

References 131

Author Index 137

Subject Index 142

8

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# Note From the Series Editors

Few topics are as important as the development of identity and the role of literacy in this process. In this eighth book in the Literacy Studies Series, Sarah J. McCarthey synthesizes a powerful body of ethnographic case study research conducted across three diverse sites. Through a qualitative lens, the children and teachers in these classes come alive, displaying varying degrees of alliance or resistance within the prescribed literacy curricula. We see the payoff and price of "doing school" in students' willingness to conform or resist practices that influence their in- and out-of-school identity construction.

Managerial and curricular practices that have their origins in business spill over into classroom settings with varying consequences for students (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2001). These practices collide with the postmodern reality that

> identity can no longer be written through the lens of cultural uniformity or enforced through the discourse of assimilation—rather, students bring to the classroom not some unified grand narrative but multiple narratives representing diverse immigration and language and cultural experiences. (Giroux, 2000, p. 190)

The case studies presented here move our debates and discussions well beyond the bounds of method into a challenging consideration of how curriculum interacts with students' identity construction. Issues of power and positioning underpin much of this work, illustrating the complex forces that cause children to weigh the costs and benefits of classroom conformity. Consistent with a growing body of work on identity construction, Sarah McCarthey's classroom research challenges past views of literacy curriculum as a kind of neutral zone, devoid of asymmetrical power struggles.

*Students' Identities and Literacy Learning* offers a carefully researched window on children and teachers as social actors, making thoughtful judgments about how to proceed in enacting their literate selves. We hope this work will challenge us to pay attention to how our curriculum decisions in literacy help or hinder students' identities in various social contexts.

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Giroux, H.A. (2000). Postmodern education and disposable youth. In P.P. Trifonas (Ed.), *Revolutionary pedagogies: Cultural politics, institutional education, and the discourses of theory* (pp. 174–195). New York: Routledge Falmer.

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# Introduction

Who are we? How did we become who we are? These compelling questions have been asked for decades by people in the Western world. However, the most recent theories about identity require that these questions be reframed: How do our social worlds construct who we are? In what contexts do we enact certain aspects of our identities? These questions reflect the shift from viewing identity as a unitary, fixed essence within the individual to viewing it as a multidimensional, fluid process that depends on social context.

At the same time these shifts in theories about identity were occurring, conceptions of literacy and their implications for changing classroom practices were evolving as well. For example, process approaches to writing have reflected a change in focus from the written *product* to a focus on *process*, and moved from considering writing as an individual endeavor to also considering the social functions and contexts of writing. Shifts from believing that meaning resides in the text to considering the interaction of reader and text within social contexts have paralleled the changes in theories about writing. In the 1980s and 1990s, some classrooms began to reflect these changes by incorporating writing process and literature-based instruction in order to provide students with more opportunities to explore their identities as readers and writers within supportive contexts. These classrooms placed the student at the center of the learning process, while the teacher acted as a scaffold, understanding students' needs and providing support for the next steps in the learning process. Writing workshops offered opportunities for students to choose topics of importance to them and to communicate with real audiences for authentic purposes. Using authentic children's literature to learn skills within the context of meaningful reading material and purposeful activities has been the focus of literature-based classrooms.

## The Influence of Contexts on Students' Identities

This book highlights the influences of school contexts, and to some extent home contexts, on students' identities as readers and writers by presenting data collected from school sites in which teachers implemented writing workshop and literature-based instruction. The three sites where I collected data from 1990 to 1999 had much in common: The students were from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, and the teachers, who were white and middle class, had extensive workshops or preservice education in writing workshop or literature-based instruction. In addition, the teachers held strong views about how to support children's reading and writing and, in many ways, were adventurers attempting to make changes in their classrooms and in their schools by introducing innovative instruction to their students and other teachers.

The primary focus in this book is on the students, but in providing information about the contexts in which they read and wrote, I also demonstrate the power of the teacher-student relationship, the importance of the classroom curriculum, and the influence of parents and peers on students. As I recount students' stories, several important issues are acknowledged about my relationships with them: First, the students and I came from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and although I may not have presented their stories in the same way as a researcher who shared their backgrounds would have, I learned much from trying to understand their worlds. Second, I developed significant relationships with many of the students, and therefore I may reveal some bias toward the students' points of view over those of the teachers. For example, in the case of Anita in Chapter 2, I provide examples of the teacher-student writing conference and suggest that the teacher was imposing her view of good writing on the student. Although the teacher's explanation is presented, I interpreted the interaction from the point of view of the student. Third, I constructed narratives about the students based on my interviews with them, my interpretations of their writing, and my observations of them in different contexts; however, they did not have the opportunity to read my interpretations or respond to my characterizations of them. With this in mind, I present snapshots of nine students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, who taught me lessons about what it means to learn to read and write in U.S. classrooms. Their stories illustrate the dynamic relationship between identity and context and the value of understanding individual children in relation to their home and school cultures.

## Organization of the Book

In Chapter 1, I outline the theoretical foundations of the constructs of identity and briefly review the literature relevant to current literacy practices; provide an overview of the methods used in each of the three studies from which I draw; and define the frames used for analysis such as appropriation, resistance, and transformation. Subsequent chapters are organized according to three features: (1) presenting the data in chronological order of its collection, (2) presenting data that captures an evolving sense of the various contexts that shape and are shaped by students' identities, and (3) selecting cases that represent the concepts I wished to explore.

The site of the first study was a combination fifth/sixth-grade classroom in New York City in the fall of 1990. I collected data for 5 weeks on students' views about writing and their interactions with the teacher. The site of the second study was a third/fourth-grade classroom in central Texas during the 1994–1995 school year, where I expanded my understanding of the contexts that influenced students' literacy learning. I made home visits and asked students to talk more about their home literacy learning. These data helped me to focus more on issues of identity and the ways that various contexts influence students' views of reading and writing. For the third study conducted in the spring of 1999, I collected data at another central Texas site to incorporate in the studies not only information about home and school settings, but also about peers. I was particularly interested in the constructed nature of identity and how others' perceptions (teachers, parents, and peers) of a student might influence a particular student's views of literacy tasks. Although I interviewed and gathered data from parents in the latter two studies, I found the data collected in the classrooms to be the most informative about students' school literacy learning. Therefore, I organized this book by study (or site), selecting three cases from each study to illustrate the range of ways in which students shape their identities in relation to classroom settings. In each chapter, the following case studies are presented: one involving a student who appropriates the classroom norms by conforming to the rules, one involving a student who resists the classroom expectations by avoiding or challenging norms, and one involving a student who transforms the expectations to create alternative spaces for literacy learning.

In Chapter 2, I analyze the data collected from the New York City site in which students participated in a writing workshop. The three case studies used demonstrate the variations in students' understanding of the purposes of writing and their responses to classroom norms. Miguel conformed to the classroom norms and saw writing as an important tool for learning and fulfilling classroom assignments. In contrast, Anita resisted the teacher's expectations and saw writing as a dialogue with herself to be done outside of school. Ella saw writing as a creative process done for an audience and was able to transform the classroom norms to maintain her identity as a fiction writer. These cases highlight the importance of the teacher-student relationship in developing students' identities as writers.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the data collected from the first central Texas classroom site, which included interviews with teachers and parents. Three cases demonstrate the variations in students' identities as readers and writers and the contexts that influenced them. Rita, who was in the process of appropriating classroom expectations, viewed writing as a form of social connection to assist her in understanding these expectations. Greg felt oppressed by the classroom structures. He resisted through his antisocial behavior, but maintained his journal writing as an important means of self-expression. Mandy also saw writing as a form of self-expression, but she questioned the classroom norms and found many ways to communicate with audiences through different genres. These cases illustrate how teachers' implicit values affect students' views of themselves as readers and writers.

In Chapter 4, I focus on data from a fifth-grade classroom at another central Texas site, in which students participated in a literature-based curriculum, writing workshop, and a schoolwide computerized reading program (Accelerated Reader Program). Interviews with the teacher, parents, students, and peers revealed that students defined themselves in relation to various features of the school curriculum, as well as their home literacy experiences. Jennifer conformed to the expectations implicit in all three classroom routines and was well accepted by her teacher and peers. Lucas was not successful in the Accelerated Reader Program and resisted school-related reading and writing tasks. Daniel excelled in all areas of the language arts curriculum and was able to integrate his home and school writings to transform his strong feelings about race relations from one context to another. The public nature of the Accelerated Reader Program highlighted students' success or lack thereof in reading and had a strong influence on their self-perceptions as readers. These cases demonstrate the ways in which students negotiated their literate identities within classroom and larger institutional norms.

In Chapter 5, I use cross-case analyses from the three studies to draw conclusions about the relationships between student identity and home and classroom contexts. The discussion focuses on the comparisons among students who appropriated classroom norms, resisted expectations, and transformed classroom norms in some way, and contextualizes students' identities in terms of the teacher-student relationship and classroom curriculum. Implications for practice focus on (1) the need for teachers to examine their assumptions about literacy, curriculum, and the students they teach; (2) the need to understand students' backgrounds and provide relevant curriculum; (3) the importance of students having purposes for literacy experiences and audiences beyond the classroom; and (4) the need for explicit discussions about identity.

Throughout the book, I highlight the teacher-student relationship and demonstrate the ways in which the teacher's authority influenced students' literacy learning. Those students who appropriated the classroom norms tended to have their work valued in the classroom at the same time that home and school values were shared. Students who resisted classroom norms found their classrooms oppressive because their interactions with their teachers were negative and, more often than not, there was a lack of communication between parents and the teachers. Students who resisted classroom norms but who transformed their identities had found ways to interact positively with their teachers and peers. For some students, the curricular contexts such as writing workshop or literature response allowed opportunities to excel and enact features of their identities, while for other students, the same curriculum posed dilemmas and challenges. The cases display the multiple ways in which students make sense of, interact with, and enact particular features of literacy curriculum. Although each chapter portrays individual students and their teachers within particular settings, the book as a whole emphasizes the importance of understanding students within multiple, layered contexts in order to promote the continual process of identity construction.

## Considerations for the Reader

Readers of this book should consider their own literacy backgrounds, teaching experiences, and beliefs about language and learning, because the cases are intended not only to inform our instruction but also to connect to our own experiences of learning and teaching. Readers should suspend their judgments about the teachers in the studies because, as one reviewer stated, "These stories, these teachers, could be any one of us at any given time." These stories are not about bad teaching, but are examples of real-life teachers and students who interact in complex ways that are informed by social and cultural influences. The teachers worked within larger institutional norms: Some had the full support of their administrators to undertake the kinds of "adventurous teaching" (Cohen, 1988, p. 58) they were attempting, while others were rather constrained by forces such as statewide testing in Texas or schoolwide reading programs. Still others were influenced by the norms implicit in programs such as writing workshop in which certain practices were expected. All the teachers operated within their own cultural milieus and brought with them their expectations about students and literacy. As Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) point out, "teachers exist within social, political, and cultural boundaries, which are both multiple and historical in nature" (p. 130). These boundaries clearly influenced the teachers I studied.

An appreciation of the social and cultural influences that affected teachers and students can offer readers the opportunity to use this book in different ways. Teachers might see students in their own classrooms who remind them of Ella, for whom writing fictional stories was a pleasure; of Greg, who always seemed to be doing something other than what the teachers hoped; or of Lucas, who struggled to read. Or, teachers might relate to some of the dilemmas faced by the teachers in these studies and use the cases to reconsider their own instruction. Teacher educators may wish to use the book with preservice and practicing teachers to illuminate some of the conflicts that arise when implementing writing workshop or literature-based instruction. As the book suggests, although there is a wealth of models and strategies that we think will reach all learners, the truth is that teaching is situated and no single method can meet all students' needs. New researchers may see their own dilemmas reflected in my struggles to create relationships with teachers and students, and to find my voice in representing their stories. The studies in this book can raise questions about how to establish, maintain, and represent our relationships with those about whom or with whom we conduct research. I hope that this book offers all readers an opportunity to consider the multiple, dynamic identities of the students we teach, and to consider the ways in which we all are created by our social and cultural settings.

## CHAPTER 1

# Situating Identity in Theory, Research, and Practice

Picture this classroom setting:

Forty-nine third and fourth graders are seated on the carpet listening to music and imagining a scene from *Pedro's Journal* (Conrad, 1991). One teacher, Ms. Martin, reads aloud a chapter from the book and asks students to write a response in their logs. After 5 minutes of intense writing, students are called on to share their work. A second teacher, Ms. Allen, writes examples of descriptive language from the students' logs on a chart. Both teachers respond to students after volunteers have read their work aloud.

David reads from the perspective of Pedro saying the cannons on the Santa Maria went "boom boom."

[Ms. Martin writes *boom boom* on the chart.]

Ms. Martin: Very nice. I certainly do like the way David started his passage with the sound of the cannons. What were the cannons doing, David?

David: They were shooting to make the rest of the Santa Maria…[go down?]

Ms. Martin: So what did they do? They went, and they got everything they possibly could use from the Santa Maria to build this new fort. There wasn't ready-made lumber there on the island, was there? So they used the timbers from the Santa Maria to build a fort. And then I can just see it out in the distance, can't you? The cannon's going to sink the rest of it. Very nice description. Emily.

Emily reads from the perspective of Pedro about being glad to leave, being "homeward bound" yet still keeping "adventure and my dream."

Ms. Martin: But I will still keep what?
Emily: "my adventure and my dream."

[Ms. Martin writes *homeward bound*. Ms. Allen calls on Nina.] Nina reads softly, almost inaudibly.

Ms. Martin: OK, Thomas. I really like the way most of you are sitting and listening for those juicy words. From the expressions on your face, I can tell that those words delight you too. I kind of pick up from your reactions to what people are reading. I want to thank those of you who are listening. Thomas.

Thomas reads from the perspective of Pedro, "I am worried the Santa Maria will come back and haunt me in my dreams."
[Ms. Martin writes *haunted* on the chart.]

Ms. Martin: Right. Geoffrey.

Geoffrey reads about Alonzo being "full of excuses" and getting a "taste of his own medicine."

Ms. Allen: Oooh—A taste of his own medicine. I love that. That would serve him right for leaving.

[Ms. Martin writes *a taste of his own medicine* and *full of excuses* on the chart, then calls on Rachel.]
Rachel reads about bumping into the other ship, "What will become of us?"
[Ms. Martin writes *What will become of us?* on the chart.]

Ms. Allen: What will become of us? Good. I love questions at the end. Ana.

Ana reads so softly, she is inaudible.
Ms. Allen tells Ana the class could not hear her, and asks her to take her tissue away from her face.
Ana reads again.

22

Ms. Martin: It reminds you of the journal you kept while reading the story. That is a nice reflection of your personal experience. Mandy.

Mandy reads from the perspective of Pedro, describing the scene.

Ms. Allen: Good.

[Ms. Martin writes down three of the words Mandy uses—*spied, thousands*, and *decided*.]

During this teaching session, the teachers' comments were filled with praise and encouragement; they pointed out specific features of students' language, wrote down students' words, and commented orally. However, certain students' comments (e.g., David, Emily, Geoffrey, Rachel's) were extended and valued, while others (e.g., Nina's) were not. The teachers tended to implicitly value students who used descriptive or metaphorical language or asked questions at the end. The teachers' differential responses to students reflected their implicit assumptions about what constituted an ideal student response. However, some students who were not accustomed to using colorful language may have found it difficult to write in a way that matched the teachers' implicit expectations (Michaels, 1987). Those students' responses did not fit the cultural model of what the teachers had defined as "normal and natural" for that classroom (Gee, 2001, p. 720). This, in turn, may have influenced how students constructed their literate identities in the classroom setting.

In the following chapters, I draw from classroom data to explore the impact of classroom practices on students' identities as literacy learners. The next section situates literate practices, like those described in the previous scene, within larger discussions about the nature of identity, the role of language in identity, and the relationship between power and knowledge.

## Reconsidering Identity

Tensions between conceptualizing identity as a process rather than as a category have provoked extended discussions in the literature (e.g., Yon, 2000). Traditional views have focused on identity as a unified, cohesive essence belonging to an individual whose core unfolds or develops in stages (Erikson, 1968). In contrast, social constructivist and postmodern perspectives have emphasized the constructed and dynamic nature of identity. Mead (1934) recognized the self as the result of symbolic interaction with significant others. Postmodernists have taken the perspective that identity is less coherent than social interactionists proposed, and have theorized that identity is multiple, fragmentary, and contradictory (Yon, 2000).

Sarup (1996) defines identity as "a construction, a consequence of interaction between people, institutions, and practices" (p. 11). Mishler (1999) suggests that identity is relational, that is, individuals make claims about who they are by aligning or contrasting themselves with others. Identity, then, can be viewed as a process that is constructed in relation to others' perceptions (Tatum, 1997). Anzaldúa (1999) stated this view quite cogently, "We are clusters of stories we tell ourselves and others tell about us."

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) maintain that aspects of identity such as race, social class, and gender that previously were considered more essentialist in nature can be considered partial, local, and contingent on the situation. Egan-Robertson (1998) extends this view to define identity as "the intersection of a myriad of complex sociological factors (e.g., race, class, gender)" within the historical moment (p. 455). In his study of Canadian urban youth, Yon (2000) found that students constructed their identities "in relation, and often in opposition, to the constraints imposed by gender, race, and culture" (p. 122). In her study of 30 working-class young women of Latina, African American, and European American descent at an alternative high school, Weiler (2000) established that the identities of young women from particular social class or racial and ethnic groups were far from unitary or homogeneous. She found that gender identity was fluid in that young women placed different values on schooling, future employment, marriage, and children; and that there were differential effects of schooling processes on their identity construction.

Because identity is the intersection of features at any given moment, our selves may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with one another (Belsey, 1980). We can take on different identities depending on the social setting, yet there are relationships among our different selves (Gee & Crawford, 1998). Bakhtin (1981) suggests that we engage in internal dialogues that are the result of the many voices we have encountered in the past. These internal dialogues are often sites of struggle, and through these dialogues we are able to construct and reconstruct ourselves. Sarup

(1996) echoes this view by defining identity as "a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash" (p. 25).

## The Role of Language

Language plays a key role in the process of identity construction. Belsey (1980) argues, "It is through language that people constitute themselves" (p. 59). Because language and identity are linked, Gee (1990) explains that language is more than a set of rules for communication; it is an "identity kit" that signals membership in particular groups. He suggests that "Discourses" include "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (p. 142). Primary discourses are learned initially within the home and family, while secondary discourses are learned from being apprenticed to many groups and institutions. Discourses are communities of practice, and cultural models within a community define what counts as normal and what is considered deviant (Gee, 2001).

Bakhtin (1981, 1986) theorizes that inner speech is modeled on social discourse; inner speech consists of dialogues conducted with imagined audiences drawn from the many voices a person has encountered. An utterance is always responding to preceding utterances and anticipating succeeding ones, even if the speakers are temporally, spatially, or socially distant. The utterance focuses on concrete action within a particular context, yet is shaped by national languages, social languages, or speech genres (Wertsch, 1991). Bakhtin (1986) suggests,

> The unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others' individual utterances. This experience can be characterized to some degree as the process of *assimilation*—more or less creative—of others' words.... Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness," varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (p. 89)

Bakhtin (1981) describes two ways of assimilating social discourse by the individual: (1) "reciting by heart" and (2) "retelling in one's own words" (p. 341). Reciting by heart involves using another's words in the form of models, rules, and directions. This is an inflexible kind of assimilation fused with authority that is transmitted not transformed, thus it is called "authoritative discourse" (p. 342). Retelling in one's own words is more flexible and responsive, making it possible to originate an idea (Emerson, 1983). Intellectual growth in the form of "internally persuasive discourse" results from the struggle between these two forms of assimilation (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). The internally persuasive word is "half-ours and half-someone else's" (p. 345), yet it is not static and isolated, but rather a part of a creative process that can be applied to new situations. Bakhtin further describes "single-voiced" discourse as direct, unmediated, and imitative, whereas "double-voiced" discourse (p. 65) is filled with words of others, but speakers use the others' discourse for their own purposes (Morson & Emerson, 1990).

Because the word is "half-ours and half-someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1981), a concept referred to as "ventriloquation" (Holquist, 1990; Wertsch, 1991, p. 59) and is continually shaped by interactions with others, issues of power and authority come into play. Social structures that give order are enduring and invisible in the normal course of life and control to a great extent what individuals can and cannot do (Lemert, 1997). School, as a significant social structure, serves to sort students in ways that reproduce existing inequities. Bourdieu (1977, p. 19) theorizes that "cultural capital" serves as symbolic credit in which one learns to enact signs of social standing and thus provides some students with higher social standing than others. Exams, rewards, and disciplinary procedures act to ensure success for those who already possess capital, resulting in cultural reproduction (Levinson & Holland, 1996). School knowledge is internalized through "habitus" (a set of dispositions), and what appears to be natural and neutral are oppressive practices that are political and historical in nature (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 19). Gender, culture, and social class are aspects of the hierarchy that influence the social context; the sense that individuals make of a situation depends on their relative position in that social structure (Lemke, 1989). Mainstream dominant discourses such as those practiced by middle-class whites privilege those who have mastered particular ways of speaking and exclude those who have not (Gee, 1990). However, because humans are agents, they can respond to dominant discourses by adapting speech patterns to the dominant class (Foley, 1990), or by resisting, yet also reproducing, existing structures (Willis, 1977), or by reconstructing themselves within particular spaces (Dressman, 1997).

## Power and Language in the Classroom

Power is the means through which social structures sort people, "the determining force that causes some people to get less and some more of whatever is considered desirable in a social world" (Lemert, 1997, p. 127). Ideological power, projecting one's practices as universal and common sense, is exercised through discourse; those who have power can use coercion or consent to exercise and maintain power. Individuals make sense of their reality and social positions as the domains of the interactional, ideological, and local intersect through language and text. Although individuals occupy subject positions and are thus constrained by particular discoursal rights and obligations, as social agents they are also active and creative, combining discourse types to meet ever-changing situations. Therefore, "power is won, held, and lost in social struggles," and "discourse is the site of power struggles" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 74).

Power is constituted through language at both the macrolevel of the institutions and within local classrooms. Classrooms have normative patterns or scripts for defining appropriate behaviors, and as cultural spaces, classrooms are the sites of tension and conflicting beliefs (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997). Oppressive practices can occur when teachers assume that students share the same cultural practices they do and impose their scripts on students. However, students can "re-key" the teacher script by creating a counterscript that disrupts the teacher's (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995, p. 459). Although some re-keying is not successful because the teacher will not abandon the teacher script, other forms of disruption can result in the teacher and student meeting in a shared space: the "unscripted third space" (p. 459). This third space emerging from the conflict allows student interests to merge with instructional goals: "It is within this third space that students and teachers can bridge the various social spaces within classrooms" (p. 467). In classrooms where learning and language use is constructed narrowly, students may be limited in opportunities for becoming strategic learners. In contrast, in classrooms that reflect a "third space," the curriculum

27

utilizes the potential of students' own language and knowledge, and learning is facilitated by guided participation rather than through authoritarian means (Gutierrez et al., 1997).

## Classroom Literacy Practices

Recent studies have highlighted the relationship among cultural practices, literacy learning, and identity construction. My (McCarthey, 1998) examination of third and fourth graders revealed that students reconstructed their subjectivities based on the demands of the social setting. Students' classroom participation was influenced not only by race, class, and gender but also by the classroom tasks presented to them. Dillon and Moje (1998) found that adolescents assumed a variety of subject positions in different classrooms, sometimes complacent and sometimes resistant, in relation to the teacher, student teacher, and peers. In her study of seven sixth-grade girls from affluent families in Canada, Cherland (1994) explored the connections between discourse and subjectivity and found that the students clearly enacted gendered literacy practices. The girls read fiction quite avidly (8 to 10 novels a month) to emulate their own mothers who were avid novel readers, to sustain their friendship with other girls in the group, and as a way to express their emotions. Through the reading of fiction, the girls were able to explore various models of agency and express their own senses of agency by renegotiating the cultural messages of the texts. Finders (1997) found that literacy played an important role in the ways that girls made allegiances and constructed boundaries in their friendship circles. While one group of girls who engaged in note passing, writing graffiti, and reading teen magazines constructed literacy as a social event to mark allegiance and sustain social roles, another group distinguished between school assignments and texts written for private purposes. Egan-Robertson's (1998) study of a small group of eighth-grade girls in a writing club found that students seized opportunities to reshape discourses about themselves when provided an appropriate forum. Girls experienced shifts in their perceptions of themselves from that of low-achieving students to writers who could talk about racial and ethnic identity and issues of culture and power. Blake's (1997) study of 11 poor Latina and African American girls in a fifth-grade urban classroom explored their strug-

28

gle to transform their violent worlds into more peaceful ones through activist writing stances. Through writing, the girls began to struggle with issues of power, identity, sexuality, race, and gender.

Many of these studies took place in sites outside the traditional setting or in classrooms that were attempting to enact more "invisible pedagogies" (Bernstein, 1973, p. 24), that is, curricular practices in which subjects tended to be more integrated and students had more choices than in traditional settings. Progressive settings seem to provide students with more opportunities to consider who they are and how they use literacy in their everyday lives, because they support using literacy beyond the classroom. Further analyses of how students enact theories of student identity within classroom contexts can help us to identify supportive settings for student learning. For example, Au (1993, 1998) identifies reading and writing workshops as avenues for promoting literacy for students from diverse backgrounds and suggests that practices should focus on making literacy personally meaningful for students by drawing from their interests and experiences, by teaching skills within context, and by including multicultural literature in the curriculum.

## Writing Workshops and Literature-Based Instruction

The writing workshop allows teachers and students to interact around students' writing. The teacher provides time and opportunities for students to engage in writing, to talk with the teacher, and to share their writing with peers. Calkins (1986) suggests that time be set aside each school day for the workshop, consisting of (1) a minilesson in which the teacher conveys information about topics, processes, or procedures related to writing; (2) writing time in which students draft or revise their work; (3) conferences in which the teacher reads and responds to students' texts individually or in small groups; and (4) share sessions in which students respond to one another's work. Topic choice, strategies for writing, and revision are aspects of the workshop that are stressed. The teacher's role is to provide time, materials, and a structure for writing and talking about writing. The teacher also models good writing by sharing examples from his or her own writing, literature, or other students' writing; by encouraging students to write by helping with topic choice; and by supporting students to become better writers through dialogue about writing.

The teacher's role in literature-based instruction is somewhat similar to writing workshop. The teacher is expected to share literature with students and to act as an observer, encourager, and responder (Routman, 1991). Students have opportunities for shared reading, being read to aloud, guided reading, and independent reading. In each of these settings, students read poems or books from different genres that represent the spectrum of children's literature. Skills such as sight words, phonics, spelling, and vocabulary are taught within the context of reading and writing. The focus is on students' application of strategies for authentic purposes. The teacher provides students with multiple opportunities to respond to texts orally and in writing. Theme units are often part of literature-based instruction as students engage in tasks to research and to apply information in many content areas throughout the school day. Including books that highlight the experiences of diverse cultural groups has also become a part of many literature-based classrooms (Au, 1993; Harris, 1992).

The literacy practices associated with writing workshops and literature-based instruction have aimed to motivate students to become engaged in reading and writing. Yet several studies have pointed out the limitations of reading and writing workshops, especially for nonmainstream students. Delpit (1995), for example, believes that workshops fail to provide children of color with needed skills and access to codes of power. Dressman (1993) points out that the individualistic orientation of reading workshops privileges white middle-class students over nonmainstream students who may be more accustomed to communal practices. Students from diverse backgrounds may not feel comfortable selecting topics that reflect their own cultural backgrounds and sharing their writing with teachers and peers who value only mainstream topics and genres (Willis, 1995). Lensmire (1993, 2000) found that third-grade students used texts to harm each other and to isolate certain students along social-class lines. He critiqued workshop advocates for characterizing writing as personal and individual, for ignoring conflict, and for not engaging students in needed deliberation of texts.

Previous research has shown that students' views of themselves as readers and writers and their views of literacy tasks may have lasting effects on students' achievement as well as their motivation to engage in literate activities. Students who feel good about themselves as readers spend more time reading independently and have confidence in their ability to read successfully in the future (Guthrie &

Anderson, 1999). In a U.S. national survey, McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) found that attitudes toward recreational and academic reading became more negative over the elementary school years and were the most negative for the least able readers. Good readers reported understanding what they read, talking more, and reading more frequently at home for enjoyment than did poor readers (Canaday & Krantz, 1996). To promote competent readers who are confident in their abilities, we need to understand what motivates students and how to engage them in the reading and writing processes.

## Students' Views of Reading and Writing

Several researchers have suggested that individual views of reading and writing are closely connected to cultural views of literacy (Faigley, Cherry, Jolliffe, & Skinner, 1985). Holdaway (1986) and Templeton (1986) argue for specific effects of literacy on the individual, suggesting that literacy can affect our sense of ourselves. Ferdman (1990) suggests that literacy and culture have a reciprocal relationship at the level of the individual and that a person's identification with a particular ethnic or cultural group is connected to her or his perception of literacy. Although cultural identity mediates the learning and use of literacy, literacy will subsequently alter an individual's view of him- or herself. Mahiri and Godley (1998) found evidence that the strong connection between societal literacy practices and individual views of literacy affected a person's identity. Viviana, the subject of their study, had used her literacy skills to empower her parents as well as herself. When she could no longer physically write because of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, she began to feel that she was less intelligent and unable to aid her parents with negotiating in written English. Her view of herself as a highly educated, good daughter who could mediate between her Latino culture and mainstream America was revised.

Classroom practices such as ability grouping and rewarding students can negatively affect students' views of their own reading and writing capabilities. For example, Borko and Eisenhart (1986) found that students in higher ability groups were more motivated to read and had more positive views of themselves than did students in lower groups. Evans's (1993) study showed that when students saw reading and writing as demonstrations of what they knew for the purpose of pleasing the teacher and getting high grades, they began to see themselves as incompetent, no longer enjoyed literacy activities, and avoided reading and writing altogether.

Studies of avid writers point to some features of classrooms and homes that hold promise for encouraging students to view writing as purposeful and enjoyable. Hudson (1986) found that self-sponsored writing at home featured a wider range of audiences, purposes for writing, and genres than assigned and self-sponsored writing at school. Abbott (1996) suggests that children's sense of choice and control are central to their willingness to engage in self-sponsored writing. In Abbott's study, students who engaged in self-sponsored writing came from families who valued literacy, developed supportive relationships with family members, had choices over aspects of daily life, and had supportive relationships with teachers and peers at school.

Together, the studies about literacy practices reviewed here suggest that students are motivated to read and write in contexts that provide them with choice, support, and control rather than extrinsic rewards or pleasing others. These contexts provide opportunities for students to explore their identities while reading and writing for authentic purposes. It is within this frame that I investigated the following research question: How do students construct their identities as readers and writers within home and school contexts? Related to the major issue are the following subquestions:

- How do students see themselves as readers and writers?
- What do students see as the purposes of reading and writing?
- How do students respond to classroom contexts?

To investigate students as readers and writers, I collected data at three sites in the United States. The following description of methods used provides an overview of the settings, teachers, and students who participated in three different studies conducted during the 1990s.

## Methods

For each of the three studies, I was interested in how students participated in literacy practices within settings that allowed them opportunities to have choices about what they could read and write and to engage in dialogue about their literacy learning. Who they were as readers and writers was central to each study. Initially, I did not select the sites in order to do a comparative analysis. I selected each site for the understandings I could gain about individual students in particular settings and, later, found that some themes cut across sites and were worth explicating.

I chose the site in New York City because I had been working on a national project investigating 11 teacher-education programs in the United States, including the Columbia University Teachers College Writing Project (National Center for Research on Teacher Education, 1988). The particular classroom that supported the general principles of the writing project provided an opportunity to study student-teacher interactions in detail through the writing workshop. As developing writers, the students provided much data about the purposes of writing, audience, context, and their views of themselves as writers.

When I moved to Texas, a state known for its emphasis on testing and standards, I looked for sites in which teachers were attempting to teach outside the traditional teaching for the test. A graduate student informed me of a school in which there was a shifting from the norms of individual classrooms to team teaching and to designing multiage groupings. The principal of the school suggested that I meet with a team of third- and fourth-grade teachers whose curricular focus was on literature-based instruction, writing workshop, and thematic units. Their classroom provided an exemplary site in which teachers and students were experimenting with a wide variety of literacy practices, thus providing me with an opportunity to see how students saw themselves as literacy learners.

I learned about the third site, again located in Texas, from colleagues who had used a particular teacher's classroom to place student teachers. Having taught this teacher 7 years before as an undergraduate student, I was excited to learn that she was using many of the literature-based practices we had emphasized in the teacher-education program. It seemed an ideal site in which to find out how students were constructing their literate identities.

In all three studies, I used ethnographic case-study methods as described by Merriam (1998) to examine individual students within literacy contexts. Case studies are particularistic; they focus on individuals, situations, or events. They are intended to be descriptive by providing in-depth documentation of events and perspectives of those involved. Cases also are inductive and rely on building conceptual categories from the data rather than beginning with categories. To collect data for the case studies, I interviewed students on three or more occasions and interviewed the teacher at least twice at each site. Additionally, I conducted classroom observations and collected samples of students' writing. At two sites, I also interviewed parents.

Within each site, I used purposeful sampling, that is, "a sample from which one can learn the most, which fits a set of criteria" (Merriam, 1998, p. 48). Criteria for selection may include cases that are extreme or typical, have maximum variation, are politically important or sensitive, or are convenient (Patton, 1980). I identified the following criteria to maximize the potential for learning about students: (1) parents and child agreed to the child's participation in the study, (2) students represented a spectrum of low to high achievers as designated by the teacher, and (3) students were representative of the cultural diversity within the classroom. Variations in data collection procedures occurred in order to be sensitive to the particular contexts and are described here.

## New York City Site

The setting for the first study was a fifth/sixth-grade classroom in a public school in the heart of Manhattan. The school was located in a middle-class neighborhood but drew students from all parts of the city. The student population consisted of 53% European American, 16% African American, 17% Latino, and 14% Asian American, with about 30% of the school population receiving free or reduced lunch. I collected data over a 5-week period in the fall of 1990 as students participated in a writing workshop.

### Teacher Selection and Data Collection

The teacher had 18 years of experience, had attended the Summer Institute at Columbia University Teachers College, and had been implementing the writing workshop for 4 years. I interviewed the teacher on two occasions about her goals for a range of writing activities and her perceptions of students. Questions focused on her goals for the case-study students during the writing time, her perceptions of the students as writers, and her perceptions of the texts that students had produced.

### Classroom Observations

I observed writing workshop daily for 5 weeks. Classroom observations of activities during writing time included (1) teacher-directed lessons in which the teacher and students discussed issues related to writing (minilessons), (2) writing time in which students worked on their individual texts, (3) teacher-student writing conferences in which the teacher discussed the students' texts with them, and (4) share sessions in which a student shared a text and the whole class responded.

### Student Selection and Data Collection

I collected data on five students: three African Americans and two Latinos. Two were high-achieving students, two were average, and one was considered low achieving. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with each student. Formal interviews took place at the beginning (entry interviews) and at the end of data collection (exit interviews), occurred outside the classroom context, and used a set of predetermined questions for all students. Questions in the entry interview focused on students' backgrounds, their beliefs and attitudes about writing, and the texts from their notebooks. Questions in the exit interview focused on their completed drafts and events that had occurred within the classroom.

Informal interviews were conducted within the classroom context on a frequent basis. For instance, after a writing conference with the teacher, I asked students questions about the interaction. In addition, I talked to students at least twice a week about their texts and the changes they had made.

### Student Work

I collected and photocopied all notebook entries students had written since the beginning of the year and all drafts of projects. Some students, like Ella, shared with me additional work that they had written outside the classroom context.

## Texas Site: Hillside School

The setting for the second study was located in a central Texas city, with the school population consisting of 57% Latino, 39% European American, and 4% African American, with 64% of the students on a free- or reduced-lunch program. The neighborhoods where students lived consisted of both middle-class and working-class families; the wealthier, professional families tended to live in older homes near the school, while the working-class families lived in modest homes or apartments further from the school.

### Teacher Selection and Data Collection

Initially, I worked in two classrooms with two teams of teachers who had been recommended to me by a graduate student familiar with innovative schools and literature-based practices. In this book, I focus on three of the five teachers and their students. The three European American teachers were part of an instructional "block" responsible for about 49 students (in two large, joined classrooms). Ms. Allen had been teaching at Hillside School for 7 years and had been team teaching with Ms. Martin for the last 3 years. Joined by their interests in working on something "other than just what the textbook offered," both teachers found teaming a rewarding experience. At the beginning of the year, they were joined by a third teacher, Ms. Burton, whose primary responsibility was for all the bilingual children (native Spanish speakers who were learning English as a second language) in the block, and she also taught Spanish twice a week to all students.

I first interviewed the three teachers individually at the end of September about their own backgrounds, goals for literacy instruction, and views about instructional practice. I then interviewed them as a team at the beginning of November and again in March about particular students and their curricular plans.

### Classroom Observations

I conducted 1- to 3-hour classroom observations approximately three times weekly during the 1994–1995 school year. During the observations, I focused on literacy instruction occurring in a variety of contexts: writing workshop, book response, and research projects related to topics in the books; however, more time was spent observing book response because of its centrality to the curriculum.

### Student Selection and Data Collection

The original sample of students included 15 students from two classrooms. I then narrowed the sample to 9 students (4 European American, 4 Latino, and 1 African American: 3 high achieving, 5 average, and 1 struggling reader) whom I followed over the course of the year. I conducted four rounds of 30-minute interviews throughout the year with each student, focusing on his or her perceptions of home and school literacy activities, and talking to students informally during or after literacy events. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

### Student Work

I collected and photocopied all students' journals, response logs, and writing workshop folders. Students' journals included work from August through April. The teachers had created a response log for each book read aloud from September through May; the response logs contained blank, lined pages surrounded by interesting symbols related to each topic, for example, Egyptian pharaohs. Writing workshop pieces were kept in a separate folder. In addition, I photocopied and placed in another folder any other work the students shared with me, and I made copies of their portfolios in which they had selected their best pieces and written comments about what they learned from the projects.

### Parent Interviews

I conducted home visits consisting of a 1-hour interview with one or more family members of eight of the nine students. Questions focused on parents' occupations, educational backgrounds, and literacy habits at home; their perceptions of their children's literacy habits at home and in school; their descriptions of students' classrooms; and their descriptions of opportunities to attend school functions and meet with the teachers. In homes where Spanish was the dominant language spoken, a translator accompanied me.

## Texas Site: Valley School

The setting of the third study was located in an area that served inner-city, suburban, and rural children: 80% were Latino, 15% were European American, and 5% were African American. More than 90% of the students came from low socioeconomic status (SES) homes, qualifying the school as Title I. The Valley School was large (735 students), serving third through sixth graders, many of whom were housed in portable classrooms. Valley was designated a "national blue-ribbon school" by a national panel, and the school focused on the statewide Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. Many of the teachers aligned their curriculum to the tests and spent a great deal of time practicing TAAS worksheets. However, at least two teachers in the school provided an alternative language arts curriculum using reading and writing workshops and literature-based approaches (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Routman, 1991).

### Teacher Selection and Data Collection

Ms. Le Blanc was one of two teachers who used reading and writing workshops and literature-based programs in her instruction. She taught two sections of language arts to her homeroom students and to students from another fifth-grade classroom. (In turn, the other teacher taught both sections of mathematics.) Ms. Le Blanc, a European American, had 7 years of experience teaching students from diverse backgrounds while using a literature-based program and a multicultural emphasis in her curriculum. She had three major components in her language arts program: reading workshop; writing workshop; and Reading Renaissance, a schoolwide computerized reading comprehension program.

I interviewed Ms. Le Blanc on two occasions in 1999 for a total of 4 hours. She provided a detailed explanation of her language arts program and a description of each of the 12 students. I developed the interview questions from observations made in her classroom and my interest in her perceptions of the students.

### Classroom Observations

The interview data were supported by my classroom observations conducted twice a week over the course of one semester. These observations focused on teacher-student interaction during read-alouds, subsequent discussions, and follow-up activities. I also observed students during the initial periods of working on skill sheets or related activities.

### Student Selection and Data Collection

Of the sample 12 students (20% of the total number of students from both classes), 6 were from each of the language arts classes, and all received free or reduced lunch. The sample reflected the ethnic and cultural diversity of the classroom (7 Latino/Latina students, 2 African American, 1 Asian American, 1 European American, and 1 of Latina and German background). Five students were high level readers, four were average, and three were struggling readers.

I interviewed each student for an average of 45 minutes three times during the semester. The first interview (about 1 hour) focused on students' family backgrounds, their interests in and out of school, their views of themselves as readers and writers, and their perceptions of reading and writing. The second interview (about 45 minutes) focused on students' descriptions of themselves and opinions of books read within the classroom context. I also asked students to describe their peers in general terms and to describe their peers' success with and interest in reading and writing. The third interview (about 30 minutes) focused on book-selection strategies and perceptions of the schoolwide reading program.

### Student Work

I collected and photocopied writing samples from each student in the study. Samples consisted of students' journal entries in response to the books read aloud from January through April, letters written to peers, and any other materials including letters from the students who had elected to correspond with me from March through May.

### Parent Interviews

I interviewed the students' parents who agreed to either a telephone or a face-to-face interview (7 of the 12 students' mothers agreed to the interview). These interviews focused on the parents' views of their children both in general terms and with regard to their interests and success with literacy. I also asked parents about their perceptions of the classroom context and their communication with the teacher and school. The interviews varied from 25 minutes to 60 minutes.

## Researcher's Stance

I am a middle-class, European American woman who has often embraced principles underlying literature-based classrooms and writing workshops. Each of the three sites was recommended to me by educators who were familiar with the sites and believed that the teachers enacted practices consistent with process writing and literature-based ideals. My own role as a researcher in classrooms shifted over the three studies, and I am continually in the process of evaluating it.

In the New York City (NYC) site, I was a beginning researcher who was trying to understand the role of students as writers and the ways in which they appropriated the dialogue from the classroom to use in their own texts and talk. Although I regarded myself as an ethnographer who tried to understand both the students' and the teacher's points of view, I found that the students were treating me as a confidant and that I was becoming somewhat critical of some of the teacher's practices. I, thus, saw myself as more of an advocate for the students, and may have lost some of the teacher's perspective.

My original intention with regard to becoming a researcher at Hillside School in Texas was to work with the team of teachers to increase my understanding of their practices while, at the same time, helping them to engage in inquiry about their own teaching. The yearlong relationship with the team of teachers shifted to a more traditional participant-observer role as I became more interested in how students and their families were making sense of the classroom practices.

At the third site, Valley School in Texas, I took on the role of participant-observer in the classroom. However, I relied less on observations and more on data from my one-on-one interactions with students, their parents, and the teacher for understanding the perceptions of students as literacy learners. Having students write letters to me was the teacher's idea that subsequently enhanced my relationships with the students who chose to correspond with me. The focus in this study was clearly on the students, with the teachers and parents providing background information about literacy practices.

Throughout the course of the three studies, I became increasingly cognizant of my role as a researcher studying the literacy practices of students and families who have different ethnic and social backgrounds from mine. Relying on the students' and teacher's points of view in the NYC study pointed out to me the need to get to know students in different contexts and to learn more of their family backgrounds. Thus, I sought the parents' views in the second study, and parents' descriptions of their home literacy practices helped me to challenge the widely held but inaccurate notion that many working-class and poor families have little literacy in their homes. Yet, I was aware of being "the other" in my interactions with some of the Latino and African American parents, especially with regard to my status as an outsider to the Spanish language. Bringing Spanish speakers into the interview process enhanced my understanding of literacy practices and made me more cognizant of the need for increased understanding of students' backgrounds. I attempted to develop my own understandings by reading more about cultures other than my own and by examining my position as an outsider investigating others' lives.

## Analysis and Selection of Cases

Because these data came from three different sites and three different time periods, I needed a framework to select and analyze students' identities as readers and writers across the sites. As I examined the data both within particular sites and across the three sites, it became clear that there were some students who were quite adept at understanding the teachers' expectations and adjusting to them, while other students were not successful in these classrooms. Students' attitudes toward literacy seemed to be shaped by the classroom contexts and also by their relationships with the teachers. Some students' views of reading and writing seemed to open them up to the possibilities of literacy, while other attitudes limited their own practices. I began to consider frames that might aid in conceptualizing students' identities as readers and writers at the same time the theories provided an explanation for students' interactions within the classroom settings.

Harré's (1984) theory of internalization provided one suitable frame for situating students' responses to classroom settings. In his model of internalization, Harré suggests that learners move through a cycle from appropriation of the social dialogue to transformation of that dialogue for their own purposes. Bakhtin's (1981) description of the two ways of assimilating social discourse by the individual (1) "reciting by heart," or using another's words in the form of models, rules, and directions, and (2) "retelling in one's own words" (p. 341), allowing flexibility and creativity, also aided in analysis of students' understanding of classroom expectations. I have borrowed the term *resistance* from researchers such as Willis (1977), Foley (1990), and Dressman (1997) to characterize attempts by students to avoid or challenge the teacher's authority.

From these theories, I developed the categories of *appropriation*, *resistance*, and *transformation* to characterize students' primary means of interacting with the norms and expectations established by the teachers in each of the three sites. I found that some of the students in the three sites *appropriated* the teacher's expectations and norms of classroom interaction. The students understood the purposes of the literacy tasks and were able to fulfill assignments and conform to the rules and roles designed by the teacher and peers. These students tended to see reading and writing as classroom activities that had limited use outside of the classroom. They accepted the "teacher's script" (Gutierrez et al., 1995, p. 454) and their responses to the classroom were aligned with what Dressman (1997) describes as "congruence" (p. 83) between students' social backgrounds and school values.

In each school setting, there were students who were not successful and either actively or passively *resisted* the curriculum as a whole, the teacher's specific assignments, or the teachers' implicit expectations about reading and writing. These students often had conflicts with the teacher or the curricular context and found ways around classroom assignments through avoidance or distraction. These students developed "counterscripts" to the classroom (Gutierrez et al., 1995), yet like the students in Willis's (1977) study and in Dressman's (1997) studies, their resistance did not enable them to beat the system. Instead, their reading and writing activities in school were limited both by the classroom conditions and their own resistance.

There were also students in each setting who went beyond understanding and fulfilling the tasks and were able to *transform* the assignments and goals in ways that allowed them to see reading and writing as practices that they could apply to other settings. Their texts tended to reflect Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "internally persuasive discourse" (p. 342) because they appropriated voices they encountered but changed them to fit within their own purposes. By establishing a "third space" with the teacher (Gutierrez et al., 1995, p. 454), these students were successful in altering the classroom norms enough to create spaces in which they could be successful inside and outside the classroom. Having experienced some form of conflict with the classroom norms, the students were able to reconstruct their identities (Dressman, 1997) as readers and writers to both fit in and alter the classroom space.

In selecting the three cases to present in each chapter, I have chosen to align them within the framework of appropriation, resistance, and transformation in relation to classroom expectations. This frame has the advantage of showing the variations among students at each site, while also demonstrating similarities across different contexts. In using these categories, I do not intend to suggest a fixed conception of identity, but rather I intend to capture a dynamic at a point in time. Chapter 2 demonstrates this variation within the New York City site.

## CHAPTER 2

# Appropriation, Resistance, and Transformation in a Writing Workshop

My study at the New York City (NYC) site occurred during the early 1990s when process approaches to writing were flourishing. The Teachers College Writing Project at Columbia University, New York, had successfully negotiated with several NYC public schools to allow trainers from the project to work with several schools in the boroughs of Manhattan and Queens. Under the direction of Lucy Calkins, the project featured summer institutes for teachers and hands-on training in which members of the project modeled approaches to writing with students in NYC classrooms. Teachers had opportunities to implement practices, be observed by project trainers, and discuss their practices with the trainers and other teachers. The school in which I conducted my study had the full support of the principal, and several teachers were implementing the project.

The study included 28 students (14 European Americans, 7 African Americans, 4 Latino Americans, and 3 Asian Americans) from both working-class and middle-class backgrounds in the combination fifth/sixth-grade classroom. Ms. Meyer, a middle-class white teacher, had been implementing for more than 4 years a writing workshop similar to the one described by Calkins (1986). Her views that writing could empower students, students ought to have a choice of topics, conventions should be taught within the context of students' own writing, and the teacher's role is to support the student were consistent with the goals of the Teachers College Writing Project.

Students kept notebooks about their personal experiences and then selected a topic, issue, or theme to pursue in more depth, in the form of a project, and for a particular audience (Calkins, 1991).

The physical classroom reflected many of the elements often found in process-writing classrooms. The room was divided into the rug area and the table area; bookshelves contained many picture books and novels that were easily accessible to the students; and there was time set aside each day for writing workshop activities. Ms. Meyer adapted and modified ideas from Calkins's *The Art of Teaching Writing* (1986) and *Living Between the Lines* (1991). The structure of the workshop consisted of lively, teacher-directed minilessons in which the teacher (or sometimes the trainer from Teachers College) read pieces of literature to students and discussed the qualities of good writing. The minilessons were fast paced and the teacher often joked with students. She dominated the discourse by asking them questions, but also frequently offered her own opinions. During writing time, which lasted 20 to 25 minutes, students wrote at individual desks and were to remain quiet in order to eliminate distractions. While students were writing, the teacher conducted individual conferences with six to eight students. Conferences occurred in a variety of places: at the student's desk, on the rug, or at a table designated for conferences. Ms. Meyer usually opened with "How's it going?" then proceeded to ask questions, summarize what the student had said, and provide recommendations for revisions. The workshop culminated with sharing time on the rug where students volunteered to read aloud their work and teachers and peers made comments.

During the workshop, Ms. Meyer focused on the qualities of good writing. She emphasized writing from personal experience, writing for a particular audience, and using imagery and figurative language. Her emphasis on personal experience came through in her rationale for having students keep notebooks:

> I think what I want from them is to be able to just get them to become chroniclers of life—of their lives. I think for me the most important thing is that I give them this gift of being able to observe their lives, and to look at themselves and what they're doing and their place in the world, and be able to keep track of that.

Ms. Meyer communicated her emphasis on writing from personal experience through modeling—reading from her own notebook—through examples from children's literature in which the central characters wrote about their own experience, through the assignments she gave such as having students record important events in their lives, and through her conferences in which she suggested that students write about a relative or a memory. She encouraged students to write for a particular audience by asking, "Who is this going to be for?" in whole-group sessions and individual conferences. Her emphasis on imagery and figurative language came through in her text selections from children's literature and her language cues such as the need for using description or including details.

Ms. Meyer cited the institutes at Teachers College as the main sources of her inspiration for her emphasis on qualities of good writing and the importance of communicating one's own experience to an audience. She believed that modeling was essential for students to become good writers, and she evaluated her own teaching in terms of how successful students were in producing high-quality notebook pieces. Conferences with students, demonstrations, and bringing in outsiders were strategies she used for shaping students' writing.

Although all students were in the same classroom and had opportunities to participate in the writing workshop, the students held quite different views of the purposes of writing and responded to the classroom norms in a variety of ways. For example, Miguel conformed to the classroom norms and saw writing as an important tool for learning and for fulfilling classroom assignments. In contrast, Anita resisted the classroom norms and viewed writing as a dialogue with herself to be done outside of school. Ella experienced writing as a creative process for an audience and was able to transform the classroom norms to maintain her identity as a fiction writer.

## Miguel: Appropriating the Norms of the Workshop

Miguel was an 11-year-old sixth grader who came to the United States from Guatemala as a third grader speaking only Spanish. He was from a working class background and lived with his mother and brother in an apartment shared by several families. Miguel's mother worked as a babysitter at the homes of other families. There were no Spanish-speaking teachers in the school, so he learned English quickly because, "I was in the school and had to." Miguel reported that he was proficient enough to correct his mother's English. In fact, his facility with English was notable—he was fluent, articulate, used extensive vocabulary, and was a delightful conversationalist, often interspersing his comments with figurative language. He also felt connected to his Latino background as evidenced by his writing in his notebook about the difference between New Year's celebrations in the United States, which were quite boring, and in Guatemala where children were allowed to set off firecrackers.

Miguel was achievement-oriented, artistic, and articulate in conversations. He read extensively both fiction and nonfiction books. He had learned to read in Guatemala and remembered having experiences in which his uncle "used the belt" if he did not successfully pronounce the words. He wrote the following in his notebook:

> I didn't know how to read, but with a belt on my uncles hand, I soon dashed through the words. They seemed pretty hard, but I tried hard, so I wouldn't get belted by my uncle. He was serious about it to, when I got a paragraph right, he would give me a piece of gum, but when I got it wrong, well I can tell you it was terrible.

Miguel incorporated some of his early memories into his writing and had developed positive attitudes about literacy. Having been in writing process classrooms previously, Miguel was familiar with planning, drafting, and revising his writing. His notebook contained a range of entries from pieces about himself and his family to space and how things worked. He was concerned about environmental issues, especially whales, and his final project for a larger audience consisted of comparing himself to a killer whale.

Ms. Meyer held positive views about Miguel, describing him as "the greatest kid, the greatest kid, he really is," which were reflected in her notes to him about his notebook:

> Dear Miguel,
>
> It's amazing to read a notebook as honest as yours. For a boy your age to be so up-front is so special. You have a real knack for seeing yourself clearly and writing it down. Your entries are all so different and so interesting. I love your notebook and am honored to be your teacher.
>
> Fondly,
>
> Ms. Meyer

## Literacy Practices

Miguel viewed writing as a combination of epiphany and effort. He described his idea-gathering process in the following way: "I sit down there and think or I may look everywhere in the room or outside the window. But I don't get ideas when people talk about their writing." He believed that ideas would come to him if he were quiet and observant. However, when he actually started writing, he found that it took a great deal of effort. He placed pressure on himself to perform well as a writer and saw being a good writer as going hand-in-hand with being a good student. When asked about the process he went through to compose a piece, he said, "I say, 'you better write something or you'll get an F.'" His teacher also recognized that he conformed to her expectations. When talking about his project, she said, "I think he's forcing his project because he had to do it, but I'm not sure it is something that he's really that interested in."

Miguel was influenced by the classroom expectations set by the teacher. He drew heavily from the classroom dialogue and talked about features of good writing such as good description, comparisons, and imagination. For example, when discussing what he liked about his work "Man's Best Friend," he said, "I like the way I described it and described the car and I compared it to a dog." He was also sensitive to audience interest and suggested that "it depended on the reader," and that he was able "to keep them, [the audience] on their toes and I surprised them." He was able to transfer his understanding of good writing to seeing description in books; about *Lord of the Rings* (1974), he noted, "Tolkien uses lots of imagination, and he uses a lot of language, and he describes like the elves and everything, and he uses a lot of imagination at the same time." He attributed his success with writing to the teacher. For example, he said, "Without a teacher like Ms. Meyer, I wouldn't get the idea from getting description from the book…this year Ms. Meyer got me into description, so that every time I saw description in the book, I put a [sticky note] on that and wrote something like 'having a great sense of humor.'" He also appreciated the teacher writing notes to him on a separate piece of paper in response to his work: "Ms. Meyer is really good because she doesn't write in your notebook and she uses a lot of imagination, and she puts an envelope in mine which is back here and she puts a note in it."

Miguel's strong relationship with the teacher was evident in the writing conferences he had with her. Within a 5-week period, the teacher had several brief conversations with Miguel about his writing, as well as one lengthy conversation. She sat close to him during conferences and often nodded in appreciation of his language choice. In the conference in which Miguel was trying to identify a topic from his notebook to expand on, the teacher and Miguel seemed to develop synchrony as witnessed by their body language and uptake of each other's words.

After Miguel had read parts of his two entries and Ms. Meyer asked questions, she suggested that he may not be ready to do a project. However, in this portion of the conference, we can see how each speaker incorporated words of the other in his or her turn, which led to Miguel finding a topic:

Ms. Meyer: Hmm. So what do you think you want to do, Miguel? You think you may not be ready to do a project yet? Nothing really stands out as being important to you in here? You can't kind of put your finger on what's important to you?
Miguel: Well…
Ms. Meyer: OK, so…
Miguel: Mostly the killer whale.
Ms. Meyer: Uh, huh.
Miguel: It's my favorite whale and I like the way it stands out.
Ms. Meyer: Mhmmm.
Miguel: It's the colors it has.

Here the teacher had introduced the idea of "standing out," which Miguel seemed to pick up on in such a way that he associated the meaning with a killer whale standing out among other whales, perhaps because of its colors. Miguel picked up the idea of choosing a topic that was important, while making use of the term *stand out*. The teacher and Miguel seemed to arrive at a shared understanding of what the topic of the project would be; it was the pivotal point for subsequent discussions about the project. When Miguel explained that the killer whale could be mean or friendly, Ms. Meyer asked him if he thought that he was at all like a killer whale. When he responded affirmatively, she suggested that he write a comparison of himself and the killer whale. Miguel readily agreed with the idea and suggested that he knew a lot of information about the whale that he could include. In an interview, Miguel described how he saw his teacher helping him:

> I was telling her [Ms. Meyer] about my project. So I was only writing the killer whales and then she said that I have a lot of entries about myself. So I just said, "yea, I do" and then when I said I had a killer whale in me, so then she said you can compare both of them, so then I did.

Ms. Meyer continued to support his efforts in subsequent conferences by providing him with books about killer whales and by having him think about the audience for his piece. In their third conference, Miguel explained to her how he was comparing the killer whale to himself. When she looked at his paper, she pointed to aspects that she found particularly interesting and encouraged him to find more connections. Miguel initiated the exchange, and their conference continued:

Ms. Meyer: How is it coming?
Miguel: I am taking the pieces, and on, like on this piece, I write, "Killer whales can live up to 60 years..."
Ms. Meyer: Uh, huh.
Miguel: ...60 to 70 years. Then I took something from myself and I said, "But guess what? So can I!" [enthusiastic]
Ms. Meyer: OK, but why can you? See this is where the part that could become really really interesting because you are going to take really good care of yourself, you are going to see yourself like all that part about seeing yourself in the future, and you are going to exercise and stuff like that. And maybe you do a lot of swimming like the killer whale. You know what I mean? [pace increases as she becomes more involved]
Miguel: Yeah.
Ms. Meyer: You can kind of get it all into that; it is really neat. [emphatic]

Miguel had the opportunity to explain aspects he had added to his piece, while the teacher focused on aspects she liked. She then suggested another comparison he could add—that of swimming like the killer whale. Synchrony between teacher and student was particularly apparent in this interaction as teacher and student sat close together; Ms. Meyer was quite enthusiastic in her tone of voice, and Miguel nodded and smiled during their brief conference. He also became excited when he told her about the connection he had made between the killer whale being able to live 60 to 70 years and his own life span. In another interview he reiterated how much the teacher had helped him by saying,

> One day, she really got me into it because she said, because I was writing it. I was writing that the killer whale can…can live up to 70 years, 60 through 70 years, and I was just going to leave it like that and I was going to say, "but so can I." And now, I was just going to leave it like that, but she said you can write *how* you can live up to 70 years, and I wrote like a paragraph about it.

The writing conferences, interviews, and Miguel's texts all demonstrated that the teacher and student developed a shared understanding of writing tasks. Their body language and their emphasis on particular words provided evidence of their being in synchrony with each other during conferences. The interviews showed that each valued the other and that Miguel sought teacher approval. His texts reflected the teacher's voice: He compared the killer whale to himself at her suggestion, he used description and imagery in a way that was consistent with the classroom norms, and he included some of the teacher's specific ideas (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**
**Miguel's Writing Sample**

Killer Whale

I am a human being
But can't be seen
I express myself as a killer whale
But I am not a killer
I am friendly as a trained dog
But I can be fierce as a killer whale hunting
I can be your friend
But I can ignore

You know, when I go swimming I just get the feeling of being a killer whale in the deep blue ocean. Then again I feel like I am being followed by a shark, so then I get scared and I get out of the water. But thinking of being a killer whale, I then dash to the water without being scared of he shark. But imagining the shark, how fierce it would be, hurdling through the water, mouth open, wantin to crunch on my bones and rip my flesh off my bones. Boy that would be scary!

But wait, I'm a killer whale so then I would be able to tear the shark's flesh and crunch on it's bones.

With my 30 ft. body and the shark being only 15 ft., boy would I crunch him for lunch I would slap the shark on it's head with my great and powerful fluke, and let it swim away.

Killer whales can live up to 60-70 years, but guess what?

So can I! I know, because I am going to exercise, swim [but of course not as fast as the killer whale], eat properly and I am going to be as strong as the killer whale, and as brave as the killer whale.

The dorsal fin of a killer whale is 6 ft. The killer whale is like a submarine. It's great 8 ton body hurdling through the water.

It's great powerful fluke can knock off a human being's head with just one swing, as if it was playing baseball. New borns are 8 ft. long. Killer whales live in family groups of several hundred—remaining in them for life—in all oceans, mostly in cooler coastal waters. This expremely powerful whale is tame and gentle and survives well in captivity.

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## Summary

Miguel's home and school literacy practices blended together. He was able to incorporate his identity as a Spanish speaker from Guatemala by writing about his experiences in his notebook. Although he lived his early years in a context quite different from his current one, he did not seem to experience a clash between home and school norms. His early valuing of literacy, even though developed through "the belt," appeared to aid him in fitting with the classroom norms. Miguel was successful in understanding the classroom norms and composing a piece that met the demands of that community, that of composing a personal piece that included imagery and description. The teacher helped him to understand those expectations through the classroom demonstrations and through her conferences with him. Miguel seemed to have internalized the social-cognitive norms of the classroom, which provides an example of smooth interactions between teacher and student.

Miguel's identity as a writer was defined mostly in terms of the classroom norms such as using descriptive language, including metaphor and writing an interesting piece for an audience. He is an example of a student who appropriated and used classroom norms—from a Bakhtinian (1981) framework his writing was filled with the teachers' words, but he also used writing for his own purposes. Miguel's identity as a writer fit well within the cultural model of the classroom. As enacted in this classroom, there seemed to be no conflict with the primary discourses he had learned at home (although he was a second-language learner) and the secondary discourses learned at school (Gee, 1990). He seemed to accept the somewhat taken-for-granted cultural model of the classroom that embraced writing about an important person and using descriptive language. In contrast, Anita's identity as a writer was in opposition to the classroom. She resisted classroom expectations by not participating in share sessions and by choosing a topic that was not sanctioned by the teacher.

## Anita: Resisting Teacher Expectations

Anita was an 11-year-old sixth grader who had come from Jamaica and now lived in the Bronx Borough of NYC with her brother and her mother, who worked as a housekeeper. Anita took the train to school each morning by herself and reported that she entertained passengers on the train. She liked singing and dancing and entertaining people in nonschool settings, but was very withdrawn in whole-group class discussions. In fact, Anita never contributed to any of the classroom discussions, nor did she share her writing with the whole class. Anita seemed to have two quite distinct identities—her active, social self who was comfortable with adults outside of school and her withdrawn school self.

Ms. Meyer viewed Anita as a failing student who did not achieve in any subject and scored in less than the 10th percentile on standardized tests. The teacher admitted she had difficulty with her: "I haven't met her mother, her mother refuses to come to school, which is a real indication of you know, I just can't get a fix on her. I just don't like her…I think she's very, very slow." In terms of Anita's writing project, the teacher felt that she could not help her very much because "I can't make a connection with her…because I have so much trouble with her the rest of the day."

In the classroom sessions observed, Anita never made a single contribution. She had conflicting feelings about sharing her writing with the teacher, and said, "I don't want her to talk to me at all…she never does, so why should I want her to?"

### Literacy Practices

Anita had had few opportunities to participate in writing process classrooms previously; she reported having done little writing before, and this was her first year at this school. Thus, she was at a disadvantage in this school where many of the students had been socialized to writing process previously. However, Anita valued her notebook as a place where she could write down her experiences and explained that her notebook is "something you write stuff in that makes you feel sad, happy, and stuff like that—if you think someone is trying to hurt you, you just write it in your notebook."

Writing appeared to Anita to be a personal and private journey to communicate with her inner self. Writing seemed to be a kind of therapy where she recorded unpleasant experiences and memories. She offered, "I hate writing reading entries because there is hardly anything in the book to write about that happens in your life. My life is harder because my father is really out of shape." She had several entries about experiences from her life and several references to her father, implying, but not specifically stating, some abuse.

Anita used writing as dialogue with herself rather than as communication with an audience. She feared rejection from the teacher and did not seek help from her: "If I did not go to her, she might not talk to me," and later, "she doesn't talk to me about anything." Although she recognized that Ms. Meyer was interested in teaching them about description, Anita did not consciously integrate what she learned in class into her writing. She was more concerned with recording her memorable experiences rather than learning the teacher's agenda. Anita seemed to connect the topic of writing with writing itself, not distancing herself from the process. For example, when asked which texts she liked and why, she chose the pieces that reflected her experiences and the people and things she valued. For example, she liked a notebook entry about her grandfather because, "I like the way he loves people, was nice to them, the way he cared about them" and thought a piece about her dog was her best because, "I really love my dog a lot." Although Anita used a skill she had learned in school—writing in a notebook—and incorporated it in her home life through her notebook entries, her writing was not valued by the teacher.

During their extended conference of more than 7 minutes, Ms. Meyer and Anita had difficulty developing a shared understanding about the topic for the project. In the first part of the conference, the teacher asked Anita what piece she was thinking of developing for her project. When Anita pointed to her piece titled "Lenox Hill Camp" that she had been working on daily for over 2 weeks, the teacher tried to dissuade Anita from writing about this topic. Despite Anita's introduction of several topics related to her experiences at Lenox Hill, the teacher rarely pursued those topics. Instead, Ms. Meyer introduced the topic of Anita's father on several occasions, suggesting that writing about the good and bad experiences with her father might be more "important." Anita resisted pursuing the teacher's leads related to her father, though she answered the teacher's direct questions. The lack of synchrony between teacher and student is apparent:

Ms. Meyer: It is so interesting, Anita, that you talk about writing that because there are so many entries when I look through this. I would have thought that the thing that would have stood out to you most would have been about your father. You have so many entries about your father in here. [pace slows down; she reads from text slowly with feeling.] "When I was living in Jamaica I had a farm. We had chickens and my father has something like an idea to let the chickens..."

Anita: Lay eggs...

Ms. Meyer: "Lay eggs and sell them." I mean I could just see this becoming all the like, you know, either the good times [pace slows down].... You had a lot of good times and a lot of bad times with your father, right? [pace quickens]

Anita: Yeah. [agreeing unenthusiastically, falling tone]

Ms. Meyer: You know, it seems to me that you have all these entries about the good and the bad times about your father, and maybe you should just pick one. You know, I'm not trying to tell you what to do, you know, but, it seems to me that you have more important stuff in here than Lenox Hill camp. You know what I mean? Unless you don't really want to write about it. Do you have other good entries about your father here besides this one?

Anita: Not really. [drawn out syllables]

They look through the notebook together. Anita puts her hands on the notebook and tries to flip pages.

Anita: That is the first day of school when Nick was bothering me.

Ms. Meyer: Mhmmm [long pause]. So many of your entries have to do with your father…

Anita: This is about…

Ms. Meyer: Mhmmm…

Each time Anita introduced a possible topic, Ms. Meyer ignored it. Likewise, when the teacher brought up her father, Anita focused on a different topic. In their inflections, they emphasized different words. Essentially, no overlap of ideas existed in the conference between Ms. Meyer and Anita. This lack of overlap continued throughout the conference because the teacher did not build on Anita's ideas, but focused on what she considered important.

Ms. Meyer: Mhmmm. I don't know [sighs, long pause]. I think you need to think, I think you really need to go through this book, right? Really go through this book really carefully and read it very carefully. And take another color pen, OK, and underline all the sentences in your book, all of the places in your book where you think you wrote something so beautifully and that it was so important for you, OK? Because I think, Anita, that you have really, really deep and important things to say about

> relationships and about your mother and your father, and I just don't think that Lenox Hill is the most important thing for you in here. If you decide that that is what you want to do, OK. If it turns [out] that after this you can't find some big important idea that comes out of this for you that you would like to write about...[pace slows down, says deliberately] Maybe it's going to be wishing, you know, that your father were different, that you could have more good times like the time in Jamaica [pace speeds up]. Maybe you could really really write up that time in Jamaica because that was a really good time, wasn't it?

The teacher suggested to Anita that she describe what Jamaica looked like and that she write a letter to her father. She ended the conference by correcting Anita about the length of time the camp lasted and recommending that if Anita wrote about Lenox Hill Camp, she needed to think about what was important to her about camp.

The nonverbal actions during the conference were informative as well. When Anita talked about Lenox Hill Camp, the teacher engaged in a series of nervous gestures such as brushing her hand, scratching her face, and picking lint off her sweater. When Ms. Meyer asked questions about what was important, Anita looked at the rug, but never directly at the teacher. As soon as the teacher mentioned Anita's entries about her father, Anita's shoulders stiffened and she looked at the ground. After this, the teacher and student never made eye contact. Throughout this conference, the teacher and student did not establish a shared understanding of topic or audience.

Both participants had strong feelings about their interactions during the conferences and about the texts discussed. Anita indicated that her experience at the camp was one of the best times in her life, thus, she wanted to write about it. Ms. Meyer believed that there was more compelling material in the notebook that Anita could develop other than the Lenox Hill Camp story. Ms. Meyer said in an interview,

> I wanted her to try to see what was at the bottom of all this, you know what I mean, all these horrible pieces that she has, all these bad luck things...I was hoping that she would, you know, she's got all of these

> horrible stories.... And I didn't want to let her do that [write about Lenox Hill Camp] because that would have been just one of those, you know, "I went to Great Adventure" kind of things, "I had a lot of fun, I hid in the woods."

Ms. Meyer had suggested that Anita's story lacked getting to the bottom of something, meaning for the author to explain why something had occurred or what difference an event had made in one's life. Getting to the bottom of something seemed to entail being reflective about an event or person and describing its emotional impact. In contrast, the teacher viewed writing about Lenox Hill Camp as the "Great Adventure" genre that lacked emotional impact and focus.

The overall classroom norms, as well as the teacher-student interactions, seemed to be oppressive to Anita, and she sought ways to resist them. In terms of language and style, Anita had used very little imagery or figurative language that were introduced during the whole-group sessions. Her Lenox Hill Camp piece was long, but contained relatively few adjectives that might "give the reader a picture in his mind" (a phrase that was emphasized in whole-group minilessons), and she did not use metaphors or comparisons (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**
**Anita's Writing Sample**

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Lenox Hill Camp

My teacher was saying something and I remember the time when my old class went to Lenox Hill camp we had a lot of fun My bus was the first bus to leave a couple of us was in the bus I'll name the people. Ophelia, Cindy, Jasmin, bosise, Micle, Antony, marcus, patric, Joey, and me our bus was the first to leave After that the other bus came The teacher disided to pick out the rooms for girls and boys We were in scode [squad] one and the other class was in scoude [squad] two well [while] the girls were less. what I mean was that there were less girls. The scond [second] day that we were there the boys were Trying to come in our room. and then we plade [played] a game, spin the botle. it was a realy bad game. I'll tell you how it gose you take a botle and spin it and if it lands on a girl, then they have to wate [wait] and then you spin it agian and if it points at a boy, the girl and the boy have to go in the colset and do something and if you don't you get a slap so when I went in the closet with the boy we acted like we were doing something But we were not and I put spit all over my mouth and came out of there and they said Had fun I was like yes I had a lot of fun. and then our class introctor [instructor] came and brought us outside and we went on the seld [sled] and hade a lot of fun we went down a little hill and went on the seld and then my friend Ophlea and I were talking [taking] some ice out of the water. it was winter. It was realy cool and it was the Bigest piece of ice you ever seen. I Loved Lonx hill camp. it was like we went hikeing and I wore my water baiters [boots] and it had a hole in it and my feet were frezing so much you could do me thing [something] with it. Well then that night my teacher read us a horrour story and I got real Scared and then I could hardly sleep and one Time we aske the teacher to get a drink of water. She looked kind of wear [weird]. When she said yes, I saw some smoke come out of her mouth. I was really sick. I was so scared that the, that she might be smoking crack because she was like acting like strange all the time. Every morning and every day every morning and everybody is like was she really smoking at my table the ones that were in my group and maybe a litle and the next day maybe a litle The next day we had to go hiking so we went we learned about foot tracks, animals I don't remember how the squirel looked and anyway we went on the bridge blindfold and my friend Jasmin was Ok when I did her and when she did me I almost fell off she was so dumb. we went back to the camp it was fun Fun. we went on the hike but I got really scared because she put me at the edge of the bridge I was like get this thing off of me and I almost throw up on her. So I took off the blindfold and I was at the edge of the bridge. She was very careless. She put me at the edge of the bridge.

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Anita did write from personal experience, but her story did not focus on one or two aspects of a person or an event or contain thick description. Thus, her text did not match the teacher's image of a good text. Yet, her text contained many interesting features including several dramatic points within a structure, but these remained unacknowledged by the teacher. Her Lenox Hill piece also reflected more of a topic-association style of writing (Michaels, 1987) in which Anita introduced an idea connected to her experience at camp and then provided a number of details about that idea. Her text is similar to stories characteristic of many African American children who "plot numerous sequences of events within the context of the individual experiences combined" (McCabe, 1997, p. 460, citing Rodino et al., 1991). Her story also appears to be an oral text—she used many *ands* and *thens* to connect events, she explained some of the features of her text, and wrote as if she were telling an audience, "By the way you might be wondering how the squirrel looked, but I don't remember." She did seem to internalize some of the classroom expectations about using description, but she also expressed fear about the adult possibly using crack cocaine. As a reader, I could imagine many topics the teacher might have pursued with Anita that might have clarified her texts. Yet, the many tensions and story lines remained unexplored in the conference.

Initially, Anita planned to resist the teacher's authority, because when asked whether she was going to stick with the Lenox Hill Camp topic for her final project, she said, "Yes, because I feel like it." However, she eventually changed her mind, enlisted another student's help rather than the teacher's, and wrote a poem about her grandfather, abandoning the Lenox Hill Camp piece.

Anita's relationship with the teacher seems to have contributed to her resistance to the classroom norms and her attempts to fashion an identity as a writer outside the classroom. Anita was conflicted about her relationship with the teacher because she had to function in the classroom knowing that her work was not valued. As evidenced by the conference with the teacher, Anita's concept of text and her topic choice did not match the teacher's image of a good text for this assignment. During the course of the writing conference, Ms. Meyer never looked at Anita's story on Lenox Hill Camp. The conversation was really never about Anita's text or topic; instead, the conference revolved around finding an alternative topic. The implicit messages to Anita were most likely that the text she wrote was not valued and that it was better to write about something "important" such as her father, even if that meant writing about a painful relationship. Yet, the teacher did little to help Anita understand how to select what she considered an appropriate topic for a project. The fact that Anita was Jamaican and may not have a shared the teacher's value on traditional European American literary language seemed to have influenced the teacher's interactions with her.

Anita's story demonstrates what can go awry when teacher and student do not develop a shared understanding of topic or the criteria for writing a text. It also points out that although the teacher may have enormous impact on the student, some students can be resilient and find ways to resist overtly or covertly. Anita was not defeated as a writer by her interactions with the teacher; instead, she continued to write in her notebook but for a different audience than the classroom—herself—and for a different purpose—therapy. She also continued to value her own work and found that she liked many of the phrases and ideas she had included in her notebook.

## Summary

Anita's resistance to the classroom norms was quite admirable in many ways. Although the teacher derailed Anita's initial project and very easily could have left her feeling defeated and lacking any confidence as a writer, Anita persisted with her writing. She chose another project, she continued to use her notebook for therapy, and she shared aspects of herself with others outside the school community such as the people on the train. In these ways she demonstrated that she was quite literate—she used language in a variety of formats (notebooks, singing, dancing) to "think about and act on the world" (Gee, 2001, p. 714). However, her identity as a writer at school was limited because she felt that she needed to keep her writing private. The notebooks may have been therapeutic for her, allowing her to survive some difficult times, and connected her to an audience on the train; however, her writing did not give her entrée into the larger community at school.

The conflicts she encountered suggest that larger institutional forces were at work. Conflicts existed between her working-class, Jamaican background and the middle-class values and ways of speaking of the white teacher (Gee, 1990). She did not accept the cultural model of the classroom (which may have been invisible to her) with its emphasis on descriptive language and personal experience of a particular type (Gee, 2001). She tried to find alternative ways to enact her identity as a literate individual but may have been limited because of her challenges at school.

Anita's background and classroom experiences differed remarkably from Ella who found ways to meet the demands of the classroom

60

while maintaining her identity as a fiction writer and transforming her classroom experiences into texts.

## Ella: Transforming Classroom Norms Through a Fictional Voice

Ella was a tall, African American, fifth-grade girl. She lived with her mother in an apartment in the Spanish Harlem section of NYC and was from a middle-class background. Her mother worked as a proofreader in a publishing company; her father was a university professor who worked with computers. She had been at the school since kindergarten and had many opportunities to participate in process writing classrooms. Ella enjoyed engaging adults in conversations in which she would tell humorous anecdotes, interweaving books she had read, games she had played, and stories she had written. Ella read extensively, mostly fiction and detective novels, and enjoyed writing fiction as well as more personal narratives. She believed that the one thing she had gained from Ms. Meyer's class was the importance of literature in supplying ideas for writing: "I learned that you can use your best writing off of books. Books can give you some good ideas."

Ella believed having a career as a writer would afford her the opportunity to write about whatever she wanted. She wrote at home as well as in the school context, sometimes writing with a friend during recess. Ella kept two notebooks—a small one for her classroom writings, or as she said, "one that you use for things that have happened in your life" and a larger one for her fiction writing or the writing of "humorous stories." She kept the larger notebook secret because the writing of fiction was not sanctioned in the classroom. Her secret notebook contained several fictional pieces, some with several chapters, including a book titled *Morris and Marsha, P. I.* (the "I" is cleverly drawn in the form of an eye). Inside were three stories: "The Case of the Dog de Menson," "The Case of the Foggie Building," and "The Vanishing Castle." Each story had several chapters, with the book totaling 32 pages. This notebook also contained the story that she and her friend, Serena, had written together, much of it on the telephone.

Writing served multiple purposes for Ella, and she was forthcoming about her enjoyment of the process: "I like writing. I don't know why I like writing detective stories so much but I just do." She was aware that writing could be context specific and when asked if she considered herself a good writer, Ella responded, "It depends on what kind of a story it is" then added that she was best at writing fiction. Although she found that writing could be a tool for self-reflection, she was most interested in writing collaboratively with her friend and for an audience. She had examined earlier pieces and wanted to revise them, "because as you go along, you get new ideas…you cross out things, put in new things." She was most interested in writing when she could choose her own topics and was not forced to write. Ella was able to keep her identity as a fiction writer at the same time she fulfilled classroom assignments. Additionally, she succeeded in transforming classroom norms to suit her own purposes; for example, she inserted her "fictional voice" into the classroom notebook pieces.

Ms. Meyer felt positively toward Ella, but she did not encourage her to write fiction. She described her as an excellent student who scored in the 99th percentile on standardized achievement tests. She found that Ella had good ideas and seemed in control of school and of her writing:

> As far as her work is concerned, she really does fine. She pays attention in class, she's really a really neat kid, I really like her. I think her notebook is lovely. I mean I think it's honest, and it's really lovely, and you know there's a lot of really great things happening there. I think perhaps her project will really be very nice, you know she'll pull out those really nice pieces about her aunt and do some really nice writing about them.

Although Ms. Meyer clearly approved of Ella's notebook pieces, she was less enthusiastic about Ella or other students' fiction writing. Her dislike of children writing fiction at this point in the year rested on her assumptions that the students were too unsophisticated to see that fiction writing was based on truth—the personal experience of authors. She believed that writers used notebooks to generate ideas for fiction, but that notebooks recorded events of writers' lives that could be used for development into stories:

> [Students] don't have an idea that it really is the same and that fiction writing should really be based on truth from their notebooks. In other words, nobody goes out, Katherine Paterson [an author of children's books], nobody goes out and writes a piece of fiction that isn't based on truth somehow or somewhere. You know what I mean, and if they did do

> fiction, it should really have come, should come from their notebooks at some point.

Ms. Meyer felt strongly that students should base their writing on research or the reality that they observe around them. She expressed that students have to write from their own experience because

> that's the way it has to be for young kids. Otherwise you get these stories about Ninja Turtles, and that G.I. Joe is coming alive, and about people living on the moon. It's not based in any kind of fact or any kind of research or any kind of reality. Whatever their story is about, they're not doing any research into the reality of the fiction, you know?

## Literacy Practices

The previous examples from the teacher's interview provide background for understanding Ella's interactions with Ms. Meyer during writing conferences. The first conference focused on finding an appropriate theme or topic from the notebook to develop into a project. When Ella and the teacher began their first conference, they did not have a shared understanding about the project or what the word *important* implied. The teacher believed *important* should be something deeply personal, while Ella believed important had to do with items that were newsworthy. Ella had expressed her ideas about what constituted important issues about which to write in an interview prior to the conference:

> I don't know what I'm going to do...because, because there's no really big, important issues in here [indicating her notebook]. Except for this, I wrote about the news. I was mad though because this guy was missing since Sunday, and they found him in the lake drowned, and they didn't put it on the news or anything.

Their lack of a shared understanding is reflected near the opening of their conference:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ms. Meyer: | Mhmm. And nothing seems to stand out for you as being important? |
| Ella: | Not really. |
| Ms. Meyer: | Mhmm. Is there something you seem to write about more often than not? |

Ella: Yeah.
Ms. Meyer: What do you think that is?
Ella: Um, well, about um, usually about me and when I was little.

Although the teacher and student did not use each other's words in the subsequent sentences, they were responding to one another in such a way that communication seemed to have been clear. Ella came to understand that the topic of the project should be something she wrote about frequently in her notebook. As the conference continued, Ella said she had written some pieces about her aunt, and Ms. Meyer revisited the issue of finding out what was important about her relationship with her aunt.

Ms. Meyer: OK, so you, so you are missing her, is that what you're saying?
Ella: Yeah.
Ms. Meyer: Ahhh. So you're saying that the bottom of all this is that you're missing your Aunt Delores now and you're remembering all the wonderful times?
Ella: [Nods] And I'm mad at my grandparents because they're going to see her and they're not taking me.
Ms. Meyer: So, don't you think, what does that sound like to you...that maybe this would be that, that you have all those stories about when you used to do things with her? Well, what about if you turned them into a kind of a letter to her? That would be a really neat project, a real neat letter to her where you went on and on and talked to her about all the wonderful times, as a way to say to her I miss you so much. Maybe in a way to plan a time where you could get together? Yeah? Does that sound like something you might want to do?

Ella had become engaged in the conversation about her aunt and seemed to have found this a satisfactory topic about which to write her project. The teacher suggested that she write a letter, and this seemed to strike Ella as a good idea, evidenced by the nodding of her head at several different points. The teacher emphasized several words such as *stories*, *letter*, and *miss*, indicating these were the important ideas. In her recommendations to Ella, she also placed her inflection on *neat*, giving the implicit message that writing a letter was a good idea. However, conflict arose when Ella indicated that she had also been doing a fiction project with a classmate, Serena. Ms. Meyer did not encourage this topic and became more explicit about the procedures that Ella should go through to complete the letter to her aunt. She went on to tell Ella how to select the entries about her aunt and to turn those into a project, focusing on why those were important. In the process, she discouraged Ella from writing any fiction. The conference ended with Ella getting up from the floor and going back to her seat where she began to select existing pieces from her notebook for her project, complying with the teacher's requests.

Ella responded positively, if not enthusiastically, to her conference with the teacher. In an informal interview after the conference, Ella explained that she now felt that she understood what a project was because the teacher had explained it to her. Ella summarized her interaction with the teacher by saying that she had told the teacher she had a lot of entries about her Aunt Delores and that the teacher then recommended turning those entries into a letter to her aunt. When I asked Ella if the teacher's idea was a good one, she said, "I'm going to go ahead with it." In response to whether that was something she wanted to do, Ella responded, "Yeah. And she's [Aunt Delores] been begging me to write her a letter so it won't run up my grandparents' phone bill."

Looking back at the writing conference, it seems that initially Ella suggested that she had written several entries about her Aunt Delores. Ms. Meyer picked up on this and encouraged Ella to write about this topic for her project. Ms. Meyer also suggested Ella turn these entries into a letter that seemed satisfactory to her, because she could meet the teacher's criterion of an appropriate topic, while meeting her own interest in contacting her aunt without creating an expensive telephone bill. The teacher and student had come to a shared understanding of the project. Altlhough Ella temporarily had gotten excited about writing a fiction project, her interest waned when the teacher did not encourage her to write fiction for this project. Ella may have compromised her own interests to satisfy the teacher, but she did so in a way that allowed her to find a topic that she was interested in pursuing.

Ella's interest in the letter to her aunt developed over the next several days. She worked on her project, selecting work from her notebook and expanding upon those entries. Ms. Meyer initiated a second writing conference by calling Ella to the back table. Ella handed her paper to Ms. Meyer, who then looked through Ella's sheets of paper and started the conference by asking where the beginning was and if she had placed the entries in the form of a letter. In the next sequence, the teacher pointed out how Ella needed an introduction that would be more fitting to a letter, after establishing that there was a conflict between writing a letter (which required second person) and a story (which required the use of either first person or third person).

Ms. Meyer: Oh OK. So first you are copying all the entries, then you are going to go through this, and you are going to find how to make this because it can't be [speeds up pace] "Dear Aunt Delores, Me and my Aunt Delores have always been close." See what I am saying? [pause] So how are you going to do that? That, that's your challenge.

Ella: I have to have a new start [inaudible] something like [inaudible] I changed…

Ms. Meyer: But you need to have the whole tone change. In other words, you have to be speaking to her as if it is in a letter. See what I am saying? So if you were writing all this to her, you wouldn't be saying it like "summers were no different, something always happened like when" [reads a part from Ella's text very quickly]. You might want to say, "Remember, Aunt Delores, when" [says this slowly] or you know, remember when, or "Boy, I laugh when I think about us." It's kind of like you kind of need to be talking to her as if you would in a letter.

Ella: I started doing that, it was like I was telling it to Serena [laughs].

Ms. Meyer: Ahh, yeah, it's a good idea.

At the point where Ms. Meyer gave specific suggestions about how Ella could start her piece, teacher and student seemed to connect. Ms. Meyer leaned toward Ella who sat down, closing the physical gap between them to a distance of about one foot. Ella began to tell the teacher about how she had started to do that and had even tried it out on her friend, Serena. The two resumed their conference when Ella showed the teacher the last entry.

Ella: I'm on the last entry.
Ms. Meyer: OK, so that's when you need to kind of take all this stuff and decide how you can turn this in.
Ella: My mother said, my mother said, she um, like she got her friend to like we are making a tape.
Ms. Meyer: You are going to tape it and send it to her also?
Ella: Yeah.
Ms. Meyer: That's wonderful. [draws out word]

The teacher responded positively to Ella's suggestion that she send a tape along with her letter as evidenced by the teacher's enthusiasm in her voice. In this segment there is a much more cooperative element to their interactions. Ella initiated this part of the exchange by offering to show Ms. Meyer the last entry. Additionally, each speaker said about the same amount within a turn, and both speakers incorporated the ideas of the previous speaker. For instance, Ella stressed the word *tape*, which Ms. Meyer then picked up on, emphasizing the same word. Although the teacher provided suggestions, the dialogue was negotiated between them. Their body language also demonstrated a kind of synchrony: Both looked at the papers at the same time, looked back at one another simultaneously, looked at the papers again, and then made eye contact. Synchrony between teacher and student continued as they both laughed at some phrases and agreed on a way to begin the letter (see Figure 3). Ella agreed that she would write a letter to her aunt and began to select entries from her notebook to use for the project.

**Figure 3**
**Ella's Writing Sample**

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Dear, Aunt Delores,

I finally decided to listen to you. Instead of running up your or Grandma's phone bill I'm writing you a letter. Remember those stories you used to tell me about when I was little. "I know" "I know." Of course you remember them. Well you're going to hear them again. My way! Here's one you've told me only once, you'll remember it once you hear it. Here it goes: It was snowing, ice covered the ground. We were on are way to the grocery store for Grandma. I had to skip to keep up with you. Snow drifted down onto my nose We giggled as we walked even though I had something else on my mind—"mischief"! I waited for the perfect moment then wriggled out of your grasp. I ran with the wind and slipped and fell and sat there for a few seconds then burst out laughing. Meanwhile you had run after me and slipped and fell, almost landing on top of me. "Yikes" I said as I scrambled to the side. Your face turned red as a beet but then you started laughing. We tried to get up but we could'nt. Finally sombody got us up. You carried me there and back.

Sound familiar? There's your all-time favorite. Oh by the way could you and a few other family members come to my recital in June? I would really like you to be there and hopefully you'll meet my sister! Well here comes the story. It was a sunny summer day. I was staying at your apartment and we were eating breakfast. I glanced over to your plate and noticed that you had more sausage than I did. "I want some orange juice please" I said. I watched you get the juice. Before I quickly swiped one of your sausages onto my plate, you came back with the juice. "Hey," you said "how come I only have 3 sausages and you have 4?" "I don't know," I answered You didn't say anything else after that. I wondered why.

I love you and I miss you and I hope I'll see you soon.
though times were hard
and we were spread apart
I've always had faith in
you cause you were in my heart.

P.S. Please write back.
Love
Ella
P.P.S I know you told me to stop growing, but I couldn't help being 5′2 ½″.

Ella's texts showed that she not only used the teacher's suggestions, but she was able to keep her own voice. For example, in each revision of the drafts of the letter to her aunt, Ella changed the end of the story. She was able to include fictional elements that she so highly valued by writing a story in the first person (meeting the teacher's expectations), yet adding a variety of endings (her own fictional voice). In Ella's final project (Figure 3), she made use of the dialogue from the classroom, her writing conferences with the teacher, and previous experiences with literature and fiction writing. Her letter shows the direct influence of the teacher in using a letter format and in the opening line, "Dear, Aunt Delores. I finally decided to listen to you." The description she used such as "wriggled," "snow drifting," and "swiped" reflects the teacher's value on using detail and colorful language. Ella also made use of a fictional voice by setting the winter scene and adding dialogue to tell the stories within the letter. The final project combines elements—letter, narrative, and invitation to her performance. Yet, we get the sense that Ella indeed will send this to her aunt, thus developing her classroom writing assignment into a piece for an audience. Ella, then, was able to transform the classroom dialogue to fit with her previous experiences and emergent style to share with an audience beyond the classroom.

### Summary

Ella's case demonstrates how a student can comply with classroom norms yet transform them to meet her own criteria. Although disagreeing with the teacher about several aspects of writing such as writing collaboratively versus writing alone (which the teacher valued) and writing fiction as opposed to writing from personal experience, Ella had quality interactions with her teacher during the two writing conferences. These conferences were pivotal in Ella's subsequent texts, because she was clearly influenced by these conversations and included the teacher's ideas in her project. However, by including a fictional voice in her project, she used the ideas in a unique way and did not just submit to the teacher's authority. She showed that she understood the classroom norms and the teacher's expectations, but she was able to combine those features she thought the teacher valued, such as writing about the personal and using description, while developing her own style. Ella was particularly adept at finding ways to serve her own purposes within the context of the classroom. She exemplified Bahktin's (1981) "internally persuasive discourse" (p. 342) because she was flexible and able to apply her knowledge into a new setting.

Ella's background allowed her entrée into the cultural models of the classroom. Because she had a middle-class background and professional parents who supported her out-of-school writing, Ella had many opportunities to write in a variety of genres. Although some of these genres were not valued in this particular classroom, she had positive experiences in other writing process classrooms that gave her confidence in her work. Her articulate narrative style, learned at home, also provided her with opportunities to link her primary home discourse with school discourse (Gee, 1990).

## What These Cases Might Mean for Developing Students' Identities as Writers

The cases of Miguel, Anita, and Ella highlight the differences in how students viewed the purposes of writing and their views of themselves as writers. Miguel saw good writing as a part of being a good student, the result of effort and epiphany. His vision of writing aligned well with classroom expectations and allowed him to be quite successful within the classroom. His values on writing were congruent with the teacher's, and he followed the teacher script (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). Anita, by contrast, was not seen as a successful writer in this classroom and resisted the teacher's attempts to write about her father or to use the type of figurative language the teacher wanted. However, she continued to value her own work and to write for herself—quite a feat given her relationship with the teacher. Yet writing only for therapeutic purposes limited her to a one-person community, and at the same time her resistance (albeit understandable) to share her work in the larger setting prevented her from joining the larger school community. Anita was caught between pleasing the teacher and writing about something meaningful to her. In effect, her primary discourse learned at home, influenced by her status as a working-class, Jamaican immigrant, conflicted with the middle-class norms of the classroom teacher who enacted a particular cultural model of writing (Gee, 2001).

Ella, who was able to develop a "third space" (Gutierrez et al., 1995) with the teacher, became aware of the teacher's values relating to a particular kind of writing. Once she understood the teacher's implicit assumptions about writing, she transformed her pieces to include fictional ideas, as well as other elements to satisfy the teacher. In this way, she was utilizing Bakhtin's (1981) internally persuasive discourse, combining her own past work as a fiction writer with the teacher's voice of narrative through letter writing. Ella found a "liminal space" (Dressman, 1997, p. 42) or alternative space where she could create a "hybrid text" (Fecho, 2001, p. 7).

Through a comparison of the three cases, we can see how these students were both empowered and deterred as writers. While Miguel seemed to flourish in the classroom, Anita had many challenges, but she was able to find a purpose for writing in spite of the teacher. Ella was enabled by the classroom to write to her aunt, yet she also found her voice through some resistance to the classroom expectations. All three students demonstrated many literate practices: Miguel read the literal word, but also the world, for his mother, by interpreting U.S. culture and supporting her in learning English; Anita enacted quite different literate selves on the train versus in the classroom; and Ella found ways to write individually and collaboratively in different genres. Some of the students' literate practices were valued in this classroom, while some were not.

The writing workshop in this New York City classroom demonstrated the tremendous influence that the teacher-student relationship may have on students' writing and beliefs about themselves as writers. The teacher had a strong relationship with some students, and they developed a shared understanding about topics to write about and how to revise their texts into projects for an audience; at the same time, she ignored and did not value other students' texts and, by extension, their literate identities.

The conferences provide a close-up look at the relationships between teacher and students. When synchrony developed between the teacher and student, the student appropriated information and applied it to her or his writing. The conferences also allow us to see how the teacher imposed her view of good writing on the students. She drew from literature and students' writing in her demonstrations, but her interactions with students showed that she was actually quite prescriptive. By being enthusiastic about some students' topics and not others and by providing suggestions about what genres to use, the teacher communicated her own values. She held a particular cultural model (Gee, 2001) about what constituted good writing, which included selecting important personal experiences as topics, using description and imagery as features of good writing, and sharing with an audience rather than writing for oneself as the primary purpose of writing. These values were the ones that counted as valid and normal in her classroom. When a student such as Anita held a different model or was unable to read exactly what Ms. Meyer wanted, the result was unsatisfactory at best or disastrous at worst.

The conferences provide a microcosm of larger institutional forces at work. They are an example of Fairclough's (1992) suggestion that classrooms are cultural sites where local and institutional forces play out. Although the three students expressed agency within their writing, their responses were shaped by home values and discourses, by the teacher's models of writing, and by the larger institution of schooling that gives power to teachers. Likewise, Ms. Meyer's identity as a teacher had been formed by being middle-class, white, and Jewish with a long history of living and teaching in New York City. Her own views of writing were influenced by the Teachers College Writing Project that valued personal writing from a specific genre. She was enacting the discourses of the Writing Project, focusing on students as individuals who needed to express themselves, just as she was enacting larger norms connected to the institution—that is, students should be able to comprehend and conform to classroom expectations (Gee, 2001).

The teacher-student interactions within the writing workshop have much to teach us about how students' identities are formed and reshaped within the workshop. Although the intentions of the writing workshop are to promote student choice and motivation to become lifelong writers, the curriculum in this classroom was rather prescriptive. Students like Miguel can be quite successful in understanding the classroom norms and thriving within them. Students like Ella may be able to satisfy both the teacher and themselves by retaining their own identities as writers within the classroom context. However, students like Anita, whose home discourse may differ from that valued in the classroom and who have a difficult relationship with the teacher, may find their identities as writers unsupported. This lack of support can lead to increased resistance, resulting in fewer opportunities to share writing and thus, to enact their literate selves.

From these cases, it seems important to realize that students have rich, literate backgrounds and potentially competing identities. Who Anita was as a writer in the classroom differed substantially from who she was on the train, entertaining adults. Ella, too, had a more collaborative side to her, but she blended her fictional writing into her personal experiences. The cases demonstrate what Sarup (1996) describes as a blending (Ella) or clashing (Anita) of identities. Understanding students' backgrounds and allowing them to use their experiences and values in school literacy activities may encourage them to develop many literacies and identities rather than feeling the need to submerge aspects of themselves.

The cases also suggest that the teacher-student relationship is important to developing writers who take pride in their achievements. Writing conferences can serve as a powerful means to develop the teacher-student relationship; however, this close-up, face-to-face interaction also poses some risks (McCarthey, 1994). The lesson may be that we all need to become more cognizant of the powerful effects of our talk about writing with students. Teachers may wish to examine their implicit assumptions about what constitutes effective writing pieces, as well as consider how we can help students improve their writing without imposing our view on students or denying what they consider important enough to render into writing. We may need to create spaces in classrooms where students can learn about many definitions of good writing, but where they can have opportunities to try out a variety of genres.

## CHAPTER 3

# Appropriating, Resisting, and Transforming Norms in a Literature-Based, Multiage Classroom

Hillside School, located in a neighborhood with middle-class professional families and working-class and working-poor families in a city in south central Texas, had engaged in a number of schoolwide innovations in the 1990s. With the support of a dynamic principal, the school had begun a multiage grouping program in which teachers team-taught students from two grade levels for 2 years. Several teachers had begun experimenting with team teaching and multiage grouping in the early 1990s, and the rest of the school adopted the plan in the mid-1990s. Construction of additional classroom space reflected the philosophy that students should be grouped in diverse ways; thus, new designs joined classrooms with folding doors to encourage different grouping patterns. The teachers believed that multiage classrooms provided continuity of students' curricular experiences, allowed for opening and integrating curriculum, and provided the impetus for team teaching. Team teaching allowed the teachers to pool their strengths at the same time they specialized in areas within the curriculum and modeled for students problem-solving strategies and conflict management.

Along with the multiage grouping, teachers implemented a literature-based reading program and used portfolio assessment instead of traditional grading. The school had several bilingual teachers and made efforts to link to the larger Latino community they served. Students were required to take the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), but most teachers felt that they could prepare students for the test without sacrificing their literature-based programs. This attitude shifted shortly after the principal retired, and the school and district encountered problems with the state over testing. The study discussed in this chapter took place at the height of the principal and school's innovations when the district supported the school's curriculum; many visitors came to the school to observe the programs and several of the teachers were asked to make presentations throughout the state.

The three teachers I studied formed an instructional team responsible for 49 third and fourth graders. They planned all curricular activities together and emphasized innovative reading and writing practices that they had learned from whole language workshops led by educators in New Zealand. The teachers integrated curriculum across the subject areas, provided many opportunities for students to read and write, and allowed students to pursue interests through research projects. The classroom was considered a bilingual classroom because one of the teachers spoke fluent Spanish, conducted ESL instruction for Spanish-speaking students, and taught Spanish as a class to all of the third and fourth graders. The teachers were committed to all aspects of the program: the multiage component, the literature-based and writing workshop aspects, and the thematic units. They believed that they were allowed considerable freedom in designing their curriculum and meeting the needs of their students as long as the students continued to perform well on TAAS.

## Classroom Literacy Activities

The school day generally began with students writing in their personal journals; students were allowed to write about anything they wanted and the teachers read their entries and initialed them, but did not comment on them. Interspersed throughout the day were literacy activities such as research, writing workshop, and writing articles for the weekly class newspaper. Research occurred in conjunction with the units of study, while writing workshop occurred only about once a week.

Book response was a central feature of the literacy activities around which many of the others revolved. The teachers selected a children's book, which became the focus of a unit of study (from 2 to 12 weeks) and connected social studies and science concepts to the novels. For example, during the unit on *Pedro's Journal* (Conrad, 1991), a first-person narrative about Columbus's landing in America, students learned about sailing and did research projects on events connected to that time in history, for example, the bubonic plague or Florence, Italy, as a center of culture. Daily book response consisted of all students gathering together on the rug to listen to a chapter or two read aloud from the novel. While one teacher read aloud, the other teacher wrote a summary of the events on a chart (the bilingual teacher wrote an additional summary in Spanish). At the end of the read-aloud, students wrote in their response logs (open-ended response journals) for 5 minutes. The emphasis was on students writing their ideas without concern for spelling or punctuation.

Because the teachers believed it was important for students to hear one another's ideas, they encouraged students to share their response logs with the entire group. The teaming situation allowed all teachers to respond to students, freely chiming in when they felt it necessary without assigning teacher roles. One of the teachers wrote several words (what they referred to as "colorful language") used by the students on a chart for the purpose of building vocabulary. Ms. Martin said, "I can't think of a better way for these children to start using some of these [vocabulary from the novels] than posting it in the room so they actually see it all day long, so not only are they using it in their response logs but also in their other writing." Although the teachers did not discourage students from summarizing the story, they hoped that students would go beyond summaries to adopt the characters' perspectives and to include interesting vocabulary.

## Books and Related Tasks

The first book read aloud during book response, *Pedro's Journal*, tells the story of Columbus's landing in America through the eyes of a young cabin boy. The book attempts to present a balanced view of the relationship between Columbus and the natives by evoking sympathy for the plight of both: Columbus and his men were thousands of miles from home with dwindling supplies, and the natives, some of whom were friendly, could be hostile. Although the teachers suggested that students should "put yourself in the place of Pedro," they allowed students to write open-ended responses. The classroom followed a similar format after reading *James and the Giant Peach* (Dahl, 1961). The teachers read aloud one or more chapters, students wrote in their journals from the perspective of James, and teachers called on individual students to read their responses. Teachers recorded students' responses on a chart. After hearing some students' responses, the teachers noted that students "were just retelling the story" and responded to two girls who had complained about having to take on the perspective of another male character by altering the assignment to "You're observing the story as it's unfolding."

The format was altered for a 2-week period in late November; students met in small groups and completed worksheets together that included specific comprehension questions. *Eating the Plates* (Penner, 1991), an expository text filled with details about the Pilgrims' lives—the kinds of houses they built, the food they ate, and their habits and manners—served as the text. The final books in December were a series of picture books about different early U.S. traditions of celebrating Christmas. Some books dealt with the lives of 19th-century immigrants (of European descent), while others explored their legends or traditions, such as *The Baker's Dozen* (Shepard, 1995), but all assumed a Christian audience. Teachers used a large chart to display the names, authors, and students' responses to the books.

In the second semester, the teachers and students spent about 2 months on a unit about ancient Egypt by beginning with the mystery book *The Egypt Game* (Snyder, 1986). In the book, two young girls turn a deserted storage yard behind an antique store into a game in which they pretend they are in ancient Egypt by wearing costumes and assuming roles; other children join the game and help them solve a murder. A typical reading-response session went as follows:

One teacher, Ms. Allen, asks students to close their eyes, and she begins the imaging:

> Think back to California, on Orchard Street, the old professor's store. Look inside the windows. You see two girls, one rather tall wearing a ratty old stole and false eyelashes, the other has dark skin. There is a little boy running around; his name is Marshall. Listen to what they are

> talking about. What will happen now that there are three people in *The Egypt Game*?

Greg interrupts to say there are now four people in the game. The teachers ignore his comments. Mandy raises her hand and asks if it is OK when they are writing to be one of the girls. Ms. Allen responds that it is up to them to be one of the bystanders, one of the girls, or Marshall. The other teacher, Ms. Martin, writes a summary of events on the chart. Then students begin their responses and share them:

Emily [reads]: "Look April asked...she looks like Nefertiti with her magical smile."
Ms. Martin: I loved the choice of words, *magical* [gasping].
Geoffrey [reads]: "I think they will let her in [the game]. That is why the chapter is called 'Neferbeth,' because it is Nefertiti and Elizabeth."
Ms. Allen: So they have combined two names—Nefertiti and Elizabeth.
Greg [calls out]: It is like my god. I combined it with ferret and Nefertiti and got Feretini.
Ms. Allen: What was your god? Well, maybe we will talk about that later.
Greg: It is named after my ferret.
Trina [reads]: "I think if they let her it would not hurt their imaginary game, the Egypt game. I think it would be fascinating if they let the new girl in because her neck is shaped like the figure of Nefertiti so I think it would be wonderful."
Ms. Allen: These are great, guys.
Mandy [reads]: "Another girl and she is 9. I wonder how her imagination works? How does Melanie like this? Can I trust her to keep a secret? Maybe she'll teach the whole world about Melanie and I and the Egypt game. Then we'd be in trouble."
Ms. Martin: I like that you have chosen to take the role of April. I like that.

The response session demonstrates how the teachers set the stage for listening to the novel and for students to assume a perspective of one of the characters. The teachers' responses indicate their emphasis on including descriptive language in their pieces. The teachers did not consider this a time to discuss the chapter per se, but rather hoped that students would use their responses as an opportunity to write insights about the book and to improve their writing.

During the Egypt unit, the teachers used picture books about discoveries of mummies and artifacts to supplement the study of Egypt. Students engaged in a variety of literacy, science, and social studies activities related to the topic; for example, students mummified a chicken, made their own mummies from papier maché, put together a news show, and made tools like those used in ancient Egypt. As part of each unit, students also completed a packet of worksheets and activities that included vocabulary and skills; for example, with the Egypt unit, students learned vocabulary related to Egypt, completed maps of the country and the surrounding area, completed sheets on gods and goddesses, and deciphered hieroglyphics.

The following three cases show the way in which students responded differently to the opportunities afforded in the classrooms. While Rita applied herself to learn the set of expectations and to become a successful writer in two languages, Greg struggled to gain acceptance from his teacher and peers. Mandy, equipped to write from a variety of perspectives, was able to alter the norms ever so slightly to achieve her goals of gender equity.

## Rita: Appropriating Classroom Norms in Spanish and English

Rita was a fourth grader who was older than most of the students because she completed third grade twice due to an initial misunderstanding about her placement in a bilingual classroom. She arrived from Mexico as a kindergartner and spoke primarily Spanish at home with her mother, but spoke some English with her sisters who were high school-age. She came from a large family—a mother, a brother, and several sisters; her mother and three of Rita's sisters lived in central Texas. Different family members lived in different apartments in the city, and Rita lived with an older sister, but there was a great deal of fluidity among the households. Rita's mother and eldest sister were teachers in Mexico, but had to settle for lower status jobs in Texas; her mother could not work at all due to her diabetes.

The teachers had little contact with Rita's family, but my interviews with her family revealed that they felt frustrated with the education she was receiving. They believed that the school was trying to meet individual needs and not pressure students, but that the emphasis was not on academics. In contrast to the traditional education experiences they had in Mexico, they felt that the classrooms were too chaotic, allowed too much choice, and lacked structure. They felt the need to supplement what Rita was receiving at school by providing textbooks from Mexico at home, so she would be more challenged. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the language teaching at the school, suggesting that there were actually two groups, one for native English speakers and one for ESL students who were not receiving adequate instruction in either language. For example, the sisters believed that students should not be allowed to choose which language to use to complete worksheets, that English language acquisition should be emphasized before anything else, and that the Spanish in the school was "street Spanish" filled with slang rather than the Spanish of educated people. The family members indicated that these differences in values created conflicts for Rita in the classroom.

Rita, however, took all this in stride. She seemed to move quite easily from home to school, from Spanish to English. She reported that she read the Mexican textbooks at home required by her mother, and she helped her mother with English reading and pronunciation; she also conversed in Spanish and English with cousins and friends, wrote in both Spanish and English, and watched television in both languages. Rita made great efforts to learn English and retain Spanish while she negotiated the classroom expectations. Her after-school activities included ballet and swimming classes and watching television and movies at home.

## Literacy Practices

Although she did not particularly enjoy reading or writing, Rita wanted to be successful in the classroom. She did not want to read over the summer, but would do so if her mother required it of her. Although she had books at home, she preferred to watch movies. Yet, she loved the read-alouds at school and sought to visualize the stories. She also enjoyed listening to peers share their writing, but did not want to read her own work to the large group: "I could hear how people say things they heard in the books, so I could another time remember the things they said. But I usually don't want to share." Rita knew that the teachers wanted students to share their work: "When the teacher says it's sharing time, they could raise their hands and then they could read what they had written." She also understood that the teachers valued some writing over others: "If they like what they [students] wrote, they'll say, 'that was very nice,' and if they don't, they just say, 'Thank you for sharing.'"

Rita not only understood some of the teacher's implicit messages, but she demonstrated competence in both Spanish and English in her own writing. Her journal writing in which she began each entry with "Querido Diario" [Dear Diary] had at least a half page—usually an entire page—for each day of school. Her topics reflected her everyday interests and concerns with life in and out of school. For example, she wrote about the first day of school, her teachers, ballet class, going to the park, birthdays, and friends. These entries were almost always written in Spanish, although she wrote in English on several occasions. Rita believed that the thoughts she was trying to convey determined her choice of language; she said, "I just start writing, and I don't know what language I'm doing, and I look and it's either Spanish or English, and then I continue to write in that language."

The importance of her identity as Latina and her connections to family in Mexico were evident in her writing. For example, she wrote about her family members who were still in Mexico and ended the entry with a tribute to her mother: "A todos los quiero mucho especialmente a mi mamá" (I love all of them very much, especially my mama). She was proud of her heritage, and in the fall chose to investigate the Mayan culture for a research project. She used the encyclopedia to find information and wrote the following brief description of the Mayans in both English and Spanish:

> The Mayans
> They lived 1,100 years ago they lived in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico. They were farmers. The kids played music. The father chose who they were going to marry.

As part of her portfolio evaluation she wrote, "I realy enjoy doing this project because my mother and the rest of my sisters are part of Mayans, but I am not." She also wrote that she had chosen to do research on the Mayans "because my family have somethig of Mayans," but gave no further explanation in writing or orally of her background.

Rita's response log contained entries after each chapter read aloud. Her responses to *James and the Giant Peach*, taught in the fall, were careful summaries of each chapter written in Spanish. At the beginning of the Egypt unit, the teachers had provided questions for students to respond to, and then later they went back to the format of having students write free responses to the book chapter. Rita's responses were in English from January to March 19, in Spanish from March 20 to April 6, and then again in English during the remaining sessions in April. Her responses met the classroom expectations of writing summaries of events, making predictions about what might happen, and providing her own opinions. Although she did not volunteer to share her writing, the teachers were aware that she completed the assignments and were pleased with her work.

Rita's peers respected her, especially those who were learning English. She was willing to help them, and was often seen translating directions from English into Spanish for them. Rita achieved her greatest success when she led her group to create a bilingual fashion show for the class news broadcast about Egypt. Her team elected her to be captain and, initially, she experienced some emotional discomfort in her role as leader, as evidenced in her journal in which she wrote in Spanish about how the group was not yet prepared and expressed her hope that the project would be a success. Not only did Rita contribute much to the dialogues in both languages, but she also arbitrated the disputes among students about their various roles and contributions to the show. Later, she reported, "I learned how to work with other people and how to solve their problems." She also described the success of her group in writing when students were asked to reflect on the Egypt unit: "I think my group did an excellent job because we were the first group that did the talking in Spanish and English. I think my group did a very good job. I learned to help people if they didn't remember."

Continually trying to fit in and be accepted, Rita was successful by most standards. She wrote in both Spanish and English and found acceptance by teachers and peers for both; she completed her assigned work and was able to negotiate quite successfully the complex, sometimes conflicting, set of school and home values. The only area in which she never felt comfortable was sharing her writing with the larger group, always preferring small groups. She expressed in an interview that she would have liked to share her writing with only the ESL group, but was never afforded the opportunity: "I would want to change like when some people could share on the carpet. Like if we didn't share on the carpet, we could share after—when it was ESL time—because you [will not be] embarrassed."

## Summary

For Rita, literacy was a means to gain social acceptance into the classroom. She saw making friends and completing her work as the tools for being successful. Rita wanted to fit into the classroom and identified the smart students as those who followed the rules: "You have to follow their rules. Listen to the teacher and do what the teacher says." She did not necessarily see writing as a means to be creative, believing that the most important aspects of writing were to "use vocabulary words" introduced by the teachers. However, she used literacy to establish her identity as a Latina and to connect with others—teachers, family, and friends. Literacy was a means to achieve success in the United States, and she believed that, like her sister, she could be recognized. She stated, "My sister, she got a ribbon, and she was bilingual and a good student, and she had a $500 award for a university. She gets lots of cards and stuff. I want to be like her."

Rita successfully negotiated her literate identities in her various worlds. Although there were some boundaries between her home language of more upper-class Spanish and the school-street Spanish disapproved of by her sisters, as well as the discourses of school versus home (Gee, 1990), Rita managed to please her family and her teachers. Rather than experiencing a clashing of identities, she was able to either keep her literate identities somewhat separate (reading Mexican textbooks at home and literature at school) or blend her identities in Spanish and English in school projects (Sarup, 1996). She seemed to understand the cultural model of the need to be successful in school and speak a particular style of Spanish from her Mexican immigrant home, as well as the teachers' cultural model of writing in certain forms in the classroom (Gee, 2001).

Although Rita was an example of a student who embraced the classroom expectations about writing and behavior, Greg was at odds with the teachers and his peers on many occasions. He tended to resist the teachers' expectations through off-task behavior and by not writing at all.

## Greg: Resisting Classroom Norms Through Behavior

Greg, a European American third grader, was bright, articulate, and well-read, and was the only child of middle-class, well-educated parents. His mother was a family practice doctor, and his father was an attorney for a liberal group helping farm workers. His home was filled with books of all kinds and both parents read about diverse topics ranging from medicine to anthropology. Greg's own shelves contained a large collection of children's and adult books about war and other topics. He reported that he played soccer, took walks with his mother, and watched television, but his favorite things to do were to play computer games and read books. His mother read to him nightly such books as *The Forgotten Door* (Key, 1989) and The Redwall series (Jacques, 1986), and he read a large number of books on his own.

Games and books about war, especially World War II and the Civil War, fascinated Greg. He described his favorite computer game as "'Aces Over the Pacific,' which is this World War II game where you can fly different planes," and he was reading nonfiction books about jets and planes. His knowledge was extensive and he could name many of the types of planes and provide relevant information about them such as, "The war ended before they could be used. Like the Shooting star, the Bear cat, the Tiger Cat, the FU-4 G force air which is an E model of the force air, which is a model of the Corsair." His parents provided opportunities for him to build on his knowledge by taking him on field trips. For example, Greg and his father spent 6 weeks together driving and visiting battlegrounds in the southern United States and discussing artifacts, and he received a "huge, [in] virtually perfect condition, 12-pound Napoleon cannon ball" for Christmas. His interest in wars and battles provided him with numerous topics to write about, and his

84

enthusiasm bubbled over into school. However, Greg's attempts to bring his world of war into the classroom were not greeted with enthusiasm by the teachers. For show and tell, Greg had at different times brought a Civil War bullet and a grenade, one in which "they drilled out the explosives." Greg was aware that it might not have been a good idea because, "lesson number one, it's still dangerous and you can do a fair amount of damage if you poke someone in the head with it. It's basically a weapon, a 10-pound weapon."

Greg's mother was quite aware of Greg's interest in the Civil War and World War II, and described how he was particularly interested in artifacts. She found that, "He is really into computers, very computer literate for his age. He can search files and find things. He can access games; he is into story games where they go into a particular area and explore things." One of Greg's qualities she most valued was his quirky sense of humor, "kind of Monty Python—he gets rained on by cans of Spam, [he likes the] wild antics of this character. He likes parody, quirky British humor."

She described him as a voracious reader who tackled adult books about World War II and the Civil War, and learned a lot of geography about Europe and the southern United States as a result of his interests. She felt that his 6-week field trip with his father to battlegrounds contributed substantially to his education, but because of this intimate, one-on-one involvement with his father, he may have felt frustration in the classroom where there were many children competing for attention.

Greg's mother was pleased with the learning environment in the multiage classroom, especially the fact that they studied topics in depth. Greg reported to her some of the facts that he had learned about Egypt, but he was interested in telling her what was going on with other students, especially that he wanted to work with certain students or by himself. She sensed that he did not participate in the book response time the way the teachers felt he should. Greg's mother identified his writing as creative and found that he wrote more freely on computer than by hand.

Greg demonstrated enthusiasm in interviews about many of the projects done at school such as the Egypt unit and mummifying chickens, but it was clear that he struggled for teacher and peer acceptance. Because there was much collaborative work in the classroom, Greg had opportunities to work with others. He wanted to work on projects with some of the "popular, smart boys," but felt that he was rejected and had to work with Jack, an unpopular, off-task student who rarely completed his work. He explained, "Jack was the only person left, unfortunately. It's like the only reason why he's the only one left, everyone knows never be Jack's partner." Greg subsequently blamed Jack when the project was not completed, "We made an agreement. I would do the map. He would do the dialogue—I do the map in one night. We wait 3 weeks. I ask Jack finally at the end of 3 weeks, 'How close are you to finishing the dialogue?' And he says, 'I was supposed to do that?'"

Instead of working with a partner and for fear he might get stuck with Jack, Greg often chose to work alone. He was not happy about his role in the classroom and expressed it in his journal:

> My life is a living nightmare. Nowhon likes me. Well maby Michael and Huoston, but they live 500 miles away. I want to move back to Harlingen. I wish at least one person would like me. I loose my pencils nobody will help me find them. Every won thinks I'm a troublemaker and I want to get in trouble. I really don't. I'm sorry I will write in cursive.

The teachers were aware of Greg's isolation and unhappiness. They reported that by November they had met with the parents on three occasions and had numerous phone calls about Greg's disruptive behavior. At first, they thought that Greg's adjustment to the new school and stimulating environment of their multiage classroom might have been the source of the problem, but the parents began to share with them that he had experienced problems in his previous school. When the teachers examined his transcripts, they found that he had high test scores, but "N minus" in social skills. Ms. Allen described him as having read many books, and "he knows something about everything." However, both teachers found his social skills to be "lacking for his age." They found that he was unwilling to stay on task, "not getting his work done, the class waiting on him." He had antagonized the class such that the teachers felt, "he needs to have friends, but now he has a reputation in the classroom, and I don't know how he's going to make friends." The teachers viewed him as an underachiever who had much potential because of his depth of knowledge, but they felt that his lack of social skills and unwillingness to follow classroom rules impeded his learning. For example, they found him reading books by himself in the library center instead of being involved in the lesson with the rest of the class.

## Literacy Practices

Greg was aware of how to be successful in this classroom, such as writing in cursive and responding to the read-alouds. He noted that to be successful during book response time, "you have to be able to write the summary of the story" and to use colorful language:

> "As the seagull wailed around in the sky. A foremost island where the dark people lurked in the shadows." That's what you have to do. You can't just say "There was a bunch of water and there were bunch of little fishies in there."

Greg also knew how to be successful in writer's workshop, "you have to know how to create stories," but his stories were not always acceptable because they were gory or violent. He used examples of "Bloody Mary" in which he talked about seeing "a heap of bones and blood, also a stomach" or "as he hydro-slammed his head into a door and we ran out" to illustrate his point. Although he knew the teachers did not accept these pieces, he continued to write them for his own entertainment. Although he knew his teachers wanted him to write in cursive, he reverted back to printing after his trial runs at cursive writing in his journal.

Greg also knew that he was expected to be quiet during book response time and then write a response, yet he often displayed a lack of interest in the chapters read or in responding to them. His responses to the books were quite inconsistent; sometimes he wrote one line and sometimes he wrote about one page (20 lines). His writing seemed to directly reflect his interest in the particular chapter or topic. For example, one day he wrote, "James has some magic" for his entire entry, a week later he wrote only the date, and the following week he wrote a page-length summary of the chapter complete with descriptive words and dialogue to *James and the Giant Peach*. His journal entries about his everyday life were brief and mundane (except for the entry about how miserable he was at school), but his entries in which he wrote facts about wars were lengthy, detailed, and supplemented with drawings of battles and guns. For example, on December 12, he wrote,

> The Civil War was the bloodest war in Amercan History. About 5,000,0 people were killd
>
> The south had very little factories to begin with but as its factories fell the couldn't produce the weeapons it's armys so valubly needed. But the south had one thing the north didn't cotton you might think cotton isn't very importit It real is you make rope uniforms and gun pouter sacks. [He has drawn a picture to show someone shooting and a 100 pound cannon.]
>
> The civil war was a war with many casuletys and many battles with no way of knowing were one part of a army is. One of the most famos battles like the was the wilderness were many troops were deep in enemy lines and still thought they were in friendly tertory.

This journal entry and many related to war read like a textbook, and his talk often reflected adult inflections and book language. However, his contributions in class, which contained the same adult-like phrasing and factual accounting put off some of his peers. During small-group work, he shared a drawing with his group and they ignored him. He commented as an aside, "I guess they don't like it."

During class discussion, he often raised his hand or called out to answer questions asked by the teachers. Often he was reprimanded for calling out or not sitting up, occasionally he was dismissed from the group for being off-task, but often he was called on to define vocabulary words. The teachers often called on him to provide an answer when nobody else could, but they also demonstrated some conflict and felt the need to call on others. During a response session to the Thanksgiving book, Greg provided so many responses (some elicited, some not) that one of the teachers asked, "Have you read this book before, Greg?" to which he responded, "No, I just knew that from history." In the same session she said, "What do you think a treaty is, and I don't want to hear from Greg. Let's give somebody else a chance to show me what they know." Later on, though, when David had difficulty defining an ember she asked, "Can somebody help David?" When no one else responded, she called on Greg who said, "A little piece of wood burns off, it is glowing hot. It is like an ash, a cinder, it is hot." The teacher then commented it was right, and told David, "I know you were thinking of that."

Although he was often called on to contribute his factual knowledge to book response time, he was rarely called on to share his writing from his response log. He felt that it was a "hopeless cause" to share and described what happened: "I finish writing and then I raise my hand, then they pick Emily, then they pick David, then they pick Jamie, then Angie, then they pick everyone, then they say, 'Greg, you can do it tomorrow.'" It was difficult to understand why the teachers did not allow him to share. Some possibilities include feeling that he had already contributed during the reading of the chapter, ignoring him because he did not sit up and listen and often appeared to be disengaged, or just overlooking him because of the large number of students who could share. Although he seemed to thrive on response and attention, Greg did not receive much response to his writing; he did not share his response logs with the whole class, and his journal entries were read but not responded to by the teachers.

## Summary

Greg and the adults in his life seemed to share a view of Greg as a voracious reader who was very knowledgeable about a range of topics. However, he experienced conflicts in the classroom with the teachers because he did not obey the rules or conform to some of the classroom expectations. He felt rejected by peers and experienced loneliness and distress that often resulted in arguments with or rejection by other children. His identity as a reader and writer seemed to be shaped more by opportunities at home where he could talk at length about wars with his father, read with his mother, and play computer games by himself. Although he was successful in his home literacy environment, he did not feel supported or valued at school. His response was to try and fit in by sharing his knowledge, but also by resisting; that is, he often chose not to write during novel time, wrote about topics other than personal experience in his journal, used violent language, and argued with his peers. Greg exemplified many of the classic characteristics of a bright child who was rejected by his peers and resisted completing assignments he found unimportant.

Greg experienced the school environment as oppressive, a place that did not encourage him to express his home discourse—that of professionals who read a great deal of nonfiction and talked about history and current affairs. Although his home discourse might have appeared to be more aligned with the teachers' than was Rita's because he was a native English speaker with educated parents, Greg's discourse actually conflicted with the traditional school patterns that

89

allow little time for individual speakers to express their ideas (Cazden, 1988). His identity as a middle-class, white male from an educated family, which privileges him in society in general, did not necessarily privilege him in this classroom setting. Greg had many literate identities developed from his experiences at home and school that tended to clash (Sarup, 1996). He was not able to successfully negotiate his various literacies within this classroom; and in this way, he differed from Rita who appropriated classroom norms but did not go beyond them, and Mandy who found ways to slightly alter the expectations, especially for writing.

## Mandy: Transformation Through Social Justice

Mandy, a European American third grader, was the daughter of a teacher in the school and a cabinetmaker. She lived in a house with her parents and an older sister who had attended the school in recent years. Mandy reported that her father read to her, and her sister often joined in. Mandy said that both her parents read frequently: novels, picture books, children's magazines, her mother's school books, and books on tape. Her mother added to this information in the interview, remarking, "I love to read…for pure enjoyment…. I was an English lit major." She and her husband were reading the same book about a man who kept a diary during the Civil War. Mandy's mother also wrote articles about teaching and had submitted them for publication.

Mandy's mother indicated that besides engaging in literacy activities, her daughter also played basketball and took jazz dance lessons. Her description of her daughter included the following, "I think she's very bright, and she amazes me at the things she thinks about and how deeply she feels about them. And I really think she has a very big heart; I'm proud of her for that."

Mandy's teachers suggested that they knew her family well because they had taught her older sister, and her mother had taught at the school for a number of years. They described Mandy as "independent, very capable academically" with "lots of opportunities for experiences" such as a trip to Australia. They found that she cared about others' opinions of her. This was supported by Mandy herself who said when asked about teachers' responses to her writing, "Well it made me

90

feel good that I really did a good job and not just I thought so, that other people thought it was good too." However, she did not depend on others' views of her entirely and believed that she would persevere to get what she wanted like the character April in *The Egypt Game* (Snyder, 1986): "She kind of acted like me because if she really wanted something she had her own way of getting it."

## Literacy Practices

Mandy was an avid reader and writer, was articulate in interviews, and was a very active participant in class discussions. She read a range of books including a biography of Helen Keller, Baby-Sitters Club books, comic books, mystery books, and information books about dogs. She used her extensive reading about breeds of dogs to persuade her parents to get her a dog and convinced them that she could care for it because of her deep knowledge. She wrote in a diary and created stories to read to audiences that included her mother and grandfather: "I write them and send them to him when I'm not there."

Mandy's interest in reading and writing at home helped her to fit with the classroom norms and expectations. The teachers wanted students to focus on ideas in their response logs without concern for spelling or punctuation. Mandy internalized this concept well:

> Well, it makes you feel really good about what you're writing. Not that just if you write nobody can edit it, they're not really looking at your work, they're looking at what you say if you were really listening and how they feel about your work. Not about your writing and how perfect it is. Cause I mean I don't always use like commas and exclamation marks and stuff. I just write it cause I really write really fast sometimes, it gets messy. But I like to fit everything in my mind on the piece of paper.

Mandy had a strong sense of audience and idea development, and had little concern for grammar or punctuation. She also felt comfortable with the expectations of the writing workshop. She described topics for the workshop as, "it can be about your life or something you have or your favorite sport, or it can be just a story that you made up." Mandy wrote about her own life, often drawing from experiences out of school (e.g., visiting her father's birthplace, breaking her leg, playing basketball, and attending sporting events). She was quite comfortable with the personal expressive mode and then later moving into the fiction genre:

> Well right now I'm just working about stuff that happens to me and I think after I finish all of the stories that I really want to do then I'll start making up stories for myself because that's what I like to do. But I want to write a lot of things about my life.

Mandy volunteered and was often called on to share her writing with the class, and her colorful language was often reflected on the class charts. She acknowledged that she "shared her writing often" and that she enjoyed it because, "Well it's like you really get to express how you feel about this story, not just about how Pedro feels. I mean you're pretending you're Pedro, but it's talking in your own words."

For Mandy, responding in the logs went beyond merely summarizing but allowed her to express her own ideas. She used descriptive language and similes in her writing, and these endeared her to the teacher. For example, in response to *Into the Mummy's Tomb's* (Reeves, 1993), she wrote,

> The dust flickered behind me as I drove away from Highclear Castle. The grains looked like pieces of Carter's sole [soul] melting away like an ice cube on a peach. Suddenly I felt [indecipherable]. Carter died in pain and agony. I don't know about anyone else but I would long for him.

Although Mandy was very successful at understanding and fitting into the classroom norms, she also found ways to transform them through her flexibility and her commitment to social justice. For example, she could write well in several genres, easily moving from personal expressive to fantasy stories modeled on books she had read. Her flexibility was most noted in her ability to take on the perspectives of the various characters in books read aloud. She easily inserted herself into *Pedro's Journal* by taking the perspective of Pedro:

> How will I ever tell my mother? I am ashamed. I can't believe I sunk the Santa Maria. How could I ever do such a thing? And the Nina drifted away as if it were in outer space.

And in a later entry she found a way to express the disgust that she related to in the crew's treatment of the natives:

> I feel ashamed of taking those natives with us. My mother would feel the same. They are being torn apart from their family. But I know how they

> feel. Late at night the natives mothers and fathers came and asked to come to. I felt like they were sacrificing themselves for no reason.

In subsequent novels and picture books, especially about Egypt, Mandy also inserted herself in the text. Whether it was April in *The Egypt Game*, Aida in the book *Aida* (Price, 1990), or the jaguar in a book about rain forests, Mandy assumed the role of one of the characters, not always the protagonist, in a clear and creative fashion.

Mandy had helped create the conditions for her and her classmates to take alternative viewpoints. For responses to the first two books, students were assigned to pretend they were the protagonist and write from that perspective. Mandy complained to me and the teachers about the difficulty of always taking a boy's perspective, "Because it's like you don't really know much about the boys, you just know a lot about the girls." Partway through the second book, *James and the Giant Peach*, Mandy said, "You know, we're always having to be boys. We had to be Pedro, now we have to be James." The teachers responded positively to her resistance to identification with the male characters and altered the writing task for the response logs. They suggested that students could be "observing the story as it is unfolding" or to take any character's perspective. Mandy was pleased to report that the teachers had changed the assignment:

> See what they said is that, they said that you could be anything that you wanted, you could be James, you could be an insect, or you could just be like writing a story, or you could be just like watching them and saying like, "I can see James right now," or you just be writing the story. I really just pretended I'm writing the story...but it's in a different version.

When she saw something that she perceived as unjust, she went to the teachers and pointed it out or found a way of addressing her concerns. One concern seemed to be with gender and racial equity, and she raised questions about both at different times. For example, her mother reported that Mandy had "a real strong sense of social justice" and "thinks about the way women are treated." Mandy had asked why all the wait staff at a restaurant were black or Hispanic and the customers white and went on to suggest that it was quite unfair for the minorities to have those low-status jobs. Mandy reported, "I think about people being racist and sexist...because I think that everybody in the world should be treated evenly, and even those are not being, I really don't think that's fair."

Mandy attempted to transform her concern with racial equity into a story she had just begun writing that included characters from diverse backgrounds. She had just begun thinking about the characters and their relationships with one another: "There's one girl named Melanie, and she's Hispanic, and then Hosea's Hispanic, and Sandra is black, and Allen is white." Although the end of data collection precluded my seeing whether the story expressed themes of social justice, Mandy demonstrated that she was aware of racial differences and sought to include characters from diverse backgrounds.

In some ways Mandy was aware of her middle-class background as being privileged, "because a bunch of my friends aren't really as privileged as me," but she also attributed her success to her mother, who always worked with her. Mandy had a mature view of the strengths of other students. She suggested that "a lot of the different kids are smarter in every kind of way…some kids can't read very well but they're really good at thinking. And some kids can't really do math, but they can read the problems so that helps them."

## Summary

Mandy engaged in many literate practices at home including being read to, reading aloud to her parents, and reading independently. She also wrote diary entries, letters, and stories and shared them with her family members. She was very successful in school literacy activities, but she also found ways to insert herself and her own views of what seemed unjust into the school setting. Through her motivated and extensive literacy practices, Mandy was able to transform some classroom practices to provide more opportunities for herself and other students to write from different perspectives and to begin to consider equity issues. Her status as a successful student who was white and middle class, as well as a daughter of a teacher in the school, provided her with a kind of privilege that, no doubt, made her views acceptable to the teachers. Because her discourses from home and her cultural models fit well with school expectations (Gee, 2001), Mandy had many advantages that helped her to get the teachers to adjust the norms. No doubt, her mother helped inculcate the values of reading and writing in school-like fashion, but also encouraged her to question racial and gender inequities. Would the teachers have been so willing to look at their practices if a working-class Latina who used a different discourse style than they had raised the issues?

## What Do These Cases Mean for Students' Identities as Writers?

The ways in which students appropriated, resisted, or transformed the classroom expectations in the Hillside classrooms highlight the public and private forums for students' development of their literate identities. Although Rita did not share her work publicly, the bilingual teacher did read and correct her grammar in her journals. Much of herself as a writer was buried in her journals and her response logs, but she continued to comply with expectations and have her work valued in the classroom. The achievement of which she was most proud became public when she and her group performed their Egyptian fashion show.

In the meantime, Greg had few opportunities to share his writing publicly because he wrote journal entries that were not responded to, and he was not called on to share his writing. He did, however, have the public forum of calling out answers to questions posed by the teachers, yet his peers did not necessarily value his responses. His resistance to doing his work was more public because the teachers reprimanded him for not listening or not writing in his response log. In contrast, Mandy wrote in a variety of genres, seized any opportunity afforded in the classroom to share her work, and made public her concerns about gender roles. She drew from home and school support to develop a persuasive discourse in which she could tweak the classroom norms a bit. Like students in Phelps and Weaver's (1999) study, Greg and Mandy were better at negotiating the public space to insert their more private voices, while others like Rita were stifled by the public domain of the share sessions.

The students' texts reflect a spectrum from more authoritative reciting by heart to a more hybrid form of discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). Rita's writing tended to consist of recounting her day in her journal or summarizing the chapters in her response log. Because she was learning to read and write in two languages, the fact that her writing reflects more of an authoritative discourse is not surprising. Greg's journal entries varied from a kind of "authoritative discourse" drawn straight from academic discourse to his more personal entries such as his expression of unhappiness. Some of his log responses had the potential to be creative but remained undeveloped. At the other end, we see how Mandy developed a kind of hybrid text (Fecho, 2001) in which she brought in multiple perspectives and inserted her own more feminist views in the text.

All three students demonstrated an enormous capacity to engage in a range of literate activities and to negotiate different literacies. Rita, for example, "read" the world of her Mexican immigrant family, understanding their values while learning the language and values of school in an attempt to reduce conflict and "blend" her various selves (Sarup, 1996). Greg, while experiencing conflicts between opportunities at home and accepted school behaviors and discourse styles, also demonstrated a range of literate behaviors in his talk and writing. Mandy, whose home and school discourse styles were strongly connected and whose identities overlapped to a large degree, also had various literate identities enacted through her skills in a variety of genres. These cases demonstrate a range of literacies and identities that students assumed and enacted and suggest that as educators we need to look for and develop the range of literacies that students bring with them (Holdaway, 1986).

In this classroom, we can see how the expectation about including colorful language and vocabulary in one's writing, avoiding summarizing, and taking a (male) character's perspective were enacted. Teachers tended to praise students who used description or metaphor, therefore those aspects were counted as "normal and natural" (Gee, 2001, p. 720), and other writing was regarded as deviant. Although the teachers provided students with choices about projects to explore and emphasized students' development of voice, the teachers undermined some of their own values by emphasizing a particular kind of writing during book response to the exclusion of others. Because they only initialed students' journal writing without responding to it and did not encourage students to read their work aloud, the teachers did not value highly students' efforts to communicate their home and school experiences. Students who wrote a particular kind of piece were more likely to be valued than those who summarized or wrote factual World

War II pieces. Although not as overt in their talk with students about the qualities of good writing as Ms. Meyer in New York City, these teachers did hold certain values and communicated them through the ways they responded (or did not) to students' writing. The teachers' authority and instruction, then, tended to provide differential instruction for students and undermined their otherwise important contributions to providing an inclusive curriculum.

The three cases raise questions about the expectations we have for students and how we communicate our values. Is descriptive language the only way to write creatively? Must one always be another character? Must that character be male? The data might also suggest the importance of responding to students, not necessarily always in a public forum, in a supportive manner. Although responding daily to 49 journals would be an enormously time-consuming task for teachers, opening a dialogue with students about what they write could provide students with a reason for journal writing other than completing an assignment. Valuing a variety of genres (even recounting facts from a Civil War book) and allowing students to bring in their outside knowledge might enhance other students' learning.

Although considering the suggestions about how teachers might validate students' home experiences, we also need to keep in mind the larger context in which these teachers were working. Despite the support they received from their principal and colleagues, they were still undertaking an enormous task—changing from a traditional basal curriculum to one that is literature-based, changing from a traditional grading system to portfolios, and challenging the norms of how students are arranged in classrooms. And, they were doing this at the same time as they were preparing their students to pass a high-stakes test. As many authors (e.g., Cohen, 1988; Cuban & Tyack, 1993) have pointed out, changing the traditional structure of schooling is an enormous task, and the fact that the teachers' interactions with students reproduced traditional patterns is not surprising (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991).

## CHAPTER 4

# Appropriation, Resistance, and Transformation in Reading Workshop and Reading Renaissance

The Valley School in Texas had adopted Reading Renaissance, an offshoot of the computerized program Accelerated Reader, as the reading program throughout the school. All the books in the library were color-coded, and students were required to choose books by color, which was determined by computerized comprehension tests. Students received points for reading books and passing tests, and classrooms were rewarded with pizza parties when all students reached particular goals. The testing and standardized reading program were institutional factors that clearly affected the teachers' day-to-day practices. However, two teachers in the school who had attended universities that supported more literature-based programs added these features to their language arts programs.

One of these teachers, Ms. Le Blanc, had been a student of mine 8 years before at The University of Texas, Austin, in a course on literacy acquisition. She had taught in a variety of inner-city settings in Texas and brought a practical, down-to-earth perspective to her classroom. Although she embraced many of the ideals of literature-based curriculum and wanted students to engage in meaningful tasks while reading and writing, she understood the reality of preparing students

98

for the state tests. She compromised by combining the TAAS skills with her reading workshop:

> I'm able to work in the TAAS skills in the reading workshop freely.... I usually teach them through novel units, since I teach fifth grade. Every now and then I'll pull in a picture book unit with a theme just for variation and fun. But normally we do novel units. And I usually get through about 9 to 10 novels in a school year.

Ms. Le Blanc had many objections to the Reading Renaissance program but believed she had to go along with the principal and her colleagues in using it:

> The program is very structured. Last year, we turned in reports weekly, which was extremely time consuming and controlling of the children's reading. I feel like a Nazi doing those reports, taking off who is at risk. Last year I was a new teacher at the school, and I knew the Reading Renaissance program was very important to the principal. We had model classrooms with Reading Renaissance. We were a Reading Renaissance Model School. So there was pressure to make sure At-Risk Reports looked really good. Oh my god! It will wear you out. Wear the kids out.

She did not believe in rewarding students for reading and, unlike many of her colleagues, did not think that Reading Renaissance was a sufficient language arts program. She compromised by going along with the school guidelines but adding other features to her language arts program.

Ms. Le Blanc's fifth-grade language arts program consisted of three components: reading workshop, writing workshop, and Reading Renaissance. Her reading workshop differed from other educators' such as Atwell's (1987) definition, because it involved the teacher selecting novels to read aloud and discuss with students rather than students selecting their own books to read and write about. After reading aloud one or more chapters of the book, Ms. Le Blanc asked students to discuss or respond in their journals to particular aspects of the novels. The two novels used in the reading-workshop portion of the curriculum in January through March were both Newbery Award winners, *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1990) and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976). Written by a European American man, *Maniac Magee* is the story of a homeless 12-year-old boy who can hit a ball farther and run faster than other children. He crosses the boundary between the white west end and the black east end of town and tries to soothe rival factions from the two sides. Written by an African American woman, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* focuses on the struggle of a black family trying to hold onto their land in the southern United States during the Depression. The book portrays the family's defiance of racism amid the nightriders and burnings.

The teacher selected the novels for units with specific goals in mind. She drew from students' interests, her knowledge of their cultural and social backgrounds, and her own emphasis on books that deal with race, economics, or gender issues. Although most of her students were Latino and she believed it was important to select books that connected to students' lives, she tended to select books about issues or themes rather than books with Latino characters or authors. She selected *Maniac Magee* because it deals with

> a boy who has many challenges in his life and has to come up with ways to overcome those challenges. I felt like our students needed to know that it's OK to have challenges in your life, that our lives are not perfect. And that especially as a kid, it's OK to have problems, but you need to know how to deal with those problems in a positive way. And the second reason is because it dealt directly with race issues.

Ms. Le Blanc chose *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* because it not only addresses discrimination, but it also shows "generations of strong women." She wanted to focus on strong women for not only her African American girls but also for her Hispanic girls who "tend to be from very traditional families.... I feel like I just need to bring out different qualities in what girls and women can do." Additionally, she had noticed that in the classroom students of African American, Anglo, and Hispanic backgrounds (her designations) mingled, but at recess they chose to play with children from their own ethnic groups, and she found this troubling. There were also specific racial tensions that occurred at school, and she was aware that there were racial tensions in some of the apartment complexes where students lived as well. She wanted students to become more aware of social issues and to become more tolerant of one another. She also had an agenda of teaching students to problem solve in nonviolent ways. She stated that her goals were to have the students develop

> a sense of fairness in the world and seeing people more for who they are than for where they come from or the color of their skin. In both

> stories, the characters have problems in their lives. They generally tend to solve them positively through actions—actions that would make some changes through law or changing people's ideas of how they think. More nonviolent protest. I just want them to get a sense of fairness so they'll think [about] how they treat people and act.

The teacher then designed activities or questions for journals that asked for students to engage in a range of tasks, from asking students to define words to predicting what will happen next in the book, to connecting issues to their own lives. For example, the journal questions for *Maniac Magee* included "Find *legend* in the dictionary. Do you think Maniac will leave the Beals family? What would you do?" and "Tell me about a challenge in your own life and how you overcame it." Students also completed charts that listed columns for "main ideas, facts, opinions, and future outcomes" together as a class—many of these incorporated the TAAS objectives.

A less emphasized but valued aspect of the classroom curriculum was writing workshop. The teacher could devote less time to this because the school required teachers to teach the four TAAS test genres of writing: persuasive, how-to, compare and contrast, and narrative. It took at least 2 weeks to teach each of those, so "we don't get as much of the writing workshop as I would like." However, Ms. Le Blanc added a letter-writing component that encouraged students to write letters to another member of the class during the second semester of the school year.

The third component of the language arts curriculum was the schoolwide reading program, Reading Renaissance. Students took a test the first week of school to determine their reading levels and were placed according to a corresponding color. Students could select one or two books to check out that were their color and an additional non–Accelerated Reader book. After reading the book, students took computerized tests that checked their comprehension and determined their pass rate. When all children passed, the class received rewards such as pizza parties. Students were required to read their Reading Renaissance books for 1 hour each day in school and for 20 to 30 minutes at home.

Ms. Le Blanc had mixed feelings about the program but felt that it had more negative points than positive. Although she saw value in students' having goals and something to work toward and felt that the immediate feedback they received was important, she was concerned about the trivial comprehension questions:

> Like in *The Skirt* by Gary Soto [1992], one of the questions was, "The girl climbed *over* the fence, *through* the fence, or *under* the fence?" I mean, I couldn't remember how the girl got into it. Who cares if she climbed through the fence or over the fence? It doesn't matter. For the really high achievers, that kills them to get those questions because we don't talk about details like that in our discussions because they have no meaning.

Ms. Le Blanc believed that the program hurt both the high achievers and the low achievers:

> It certainly has many drawbacks. For a kid like Daniel, who reads at an eighth-grade level, he had the pressure to get through a novel in 2 weeks because that's when the At-Risk Report comes. Otherwise, the At-Risk Report that's turned in to the principal shows he hasn't taken a test in 2 weeks so it looks like he is not reading. For a kid like Daniel who is going to take 3 or 4 weeks [because he is reading lengthy books] and who loves to read, bad reports come out. He has an A on the At-Risk. "A" means you haven't taken the tests. He is bummed. I mean he will go to tears. And then kids like Natalie and Tanya, who have been reading a first-grade book for the entire month and still haven't taken a test, they just dread [the reports]. When you have reward parties, Tanya and Natalie are never going to be off that list [the At-Risk list]. Then those kids—and this is the real kicker—those kids are supposed to read in another room. So that's why reading is a punishment.

The multifaceted curriculum with somewhat competing goals had different effects on students. Jennifer, a successful student who was concerned with pleasing authority, fit in well with the classroom expectations across the curricular areas. In contrast, Lucas, a struggling ESL student, resisted reading his Reading Renaissance books and chose not to respond to the books. Daniel created interesting texts that represented his strong views about diversity that decried violence and shared them with the class.

## Jennifer: Appropriating Classroom Norms

Jennifer was Latina from a working-class background. Her mother worked as a hairdresser to support Jennifer, her two sisters, and two brothers. Her parents were divorced, but Jennifer spent some week-ends with her father, who also brought lunch to her occasionally at school. Her father worked for a moving company. The primary language spoken at home was English. Her mother spoke some Spanish with relatives and wanted to teach her children some Spanish.

Jennifer's mother felt that she had been a person who "slipped through the cracks," and she wanted to ensure that her children were successful in school. She felt that she could have been helped more, and was identified as a slow reader early in life and could not excel: "With reading, once they find you as slow, they put you down a lower grade instead of finding what your difficulties are." Jennifer's mother was pleased that she was able to go to business college and get a degree in word processing. Jennifer's mother did not find much opportunity to engage in literacy at home, but she did fill out paperwork for her job and read some romance novels at home.

Almost everyone close to Jennifer agreed that she was a nice girl who was quiet, yet friendly. She described herself as "nice" and her peers agreed. For her peers this meant that she was friendly to everyone, she helped other people, and that she did "everything the teacher says." Her friend, Paula, wrote to her in a letter, "You are relly, relly, relly [sic] smart. You are also relly, relly, relly [sic] nice." Her mother also found her to be "quiet—she's more to herself. She likes doing things by herself." Her teacher was very enthusiastic about Jennifer's contributions as the "errand girl." Ms. Le Blanc said, "she's the one kid I can trust to do anything and everything. She is a strong enough student both academically and [with regard to] her spirit to go to someone and ask what she missed." Jennifer enjoyed this role of errand girl and found that her teacher would describe her as "A big help. Usually in the morning when she has to do a lot of stuff, I will help her do errands."

The teacher, Jennifer, and her mother all shared similar perceptions of Jennifer's future career. The teacher explained that, "I always say, 'She's gonna be a teacher.' She's very helpful and caring. She's such a good tutor in the classroom." Her mother concurred, adding that she wanted her to be either a teacher or a pediatric doctor because she "likes to play with children, but in her own time when she wants to." Jennifer, too, stated that she wanted to be a teacher or a doctor. The shared perception by her teacher, mother, peers, and Jennifer that she was smart and nice was reflected in Jennifer's literacy practices.

## Literacy Practices

Jennifer's success with reading apparently began at an early age, because her mother reported that "As a young child, I never had to help her with reading. She caught on real quick." Jennifer reported enjoying both reading and writing: "I like to read and write. When I was in the fourth grade, I would read books and then I would write different kinds of stories that were six pages long." Her interest continued into the fifth grade where she explained that she read everything from joke books to "plain books [books that talk about everything]" to grown-up books [books with small print]."

Everyone close to Jennifer agreed that she was an excellent reader. Her peers knew that she was on one of the highest levels in the Reading Renaissance program and nominated her consistently as one of the two best readers in the class. Jennifer gauged her own reading ability in terms of the color she was on and her grades, commenting, "I am smart because I get As and Bs on my report card." She believed the program was a good one because "kids know how to read when they grow up." She found that the levels helped her "because you could see if you need to read more and get more 100s and 90s and 80s to get on the grade level you're on." She even felt positively toward the tests because "they kind of challenge you." Jennifer was quite strategic in her choices for Reading Renaissance, describing how she chooses a book:

> First I look at my color. Then sometimes I look at how many pages is one chapter, and how much points it's worth. Then I look up how many chapters there are. Like if the pages are like four pages [in] one chapter, and there's 12 chapters, and it's worth six points, I'll get it. If the pages are five pages, and there's 21 chapters, and the book is worth three points, I won't get it.

Jennifer's responses to school tasks were to meet expectations and to do her work competently and thoroughly. Organized neatly and sequentially, Jennifer's journal reflected her orientation to do well, but did not necessarily show deep insights or challenge any of the themes related to the book. Her responses to the teacher-generated questions, for example, were one or two sentences, and were school-oriented. For instance, when asked to describe her greatest challenge, she wrote "a spelling bee I took in second grade. I overcame it by studying every day and I came in second place." In response to a question about challenges she faced in the fifth grade, she answered, "One was in math class, rotation, reflection, translation. I overcame it by studying charts." Jennifer clearly valued school tasks and sought to achieve through studying and applying herself. Her writing seemed to reflect the values she had gained from her parents as shown in her response to the question about *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,* which asked, "Stacey gets a lecture from Hammer. Tell me about a lecture you've received." Jennifer wrote,

> My best friend told me that I am kind and nice to others. Also that she's proud to be my friend because I understand what she's telling me. Sometimes we disagree but whenever I'm wrong she'll explain it to me. I also get lectures from my dad like "you better do better on tests or you don't get any money on [for] your report card."

Jennifer stated that she liked writing in her free time at home and shared her work with family and friends. However, she did not elaborate or provide examples of pieces that she had written. She seemed to enjoy the classroom assignment of writing letters to a peer the most; in these letters she wrote brief summaries of what she did at home, including watching television and doing homework. She and I corresponded several times via letter in which she wrote about her baby brother and asked me questions about my son, who was then about 18 months old. Having a real audience with whom to correspond was an important factor in her motivation to write.

Jennifer's mother noted that her interest in writing tended to depend on the teacher she had, and Ms. Le Blanc found that writing was more difficult for Jennifer than reading. Jennifer believed that there were several good writers in the class, but she was good, too, because "sometimes their [classmates] faces get lit up." Jennifer believed that good writing involved "putting emotion into it" and communication with an audience, yet her topics and audiences, at least in the fifth grade, were limited to school assignments.

## Summary

Jennifer seemed to experience much success in school and support at home for conforming to classroom expectations. She cheerfully did errands for the teacher, she participated in all school reading and writing tasks, and she was perceived positively by her teacher and peers. Jennifer

105

enjoyed school, and her teacher and mother had a strong relationship with each other. The teacher said she saw her parents at school quite frequently, and Jennifer's mother felt comfortable with the teacher and would respond to notes or call if she experienced any concerns. Jennifer's writing about her father suggests that he, too, reinforced the importance of doing well at school. School and home norms were well aligned as evidenced by the school curricula that provided rewards for reading books in a similar way to Jennifer's father's reinforcing good grades with monetary rewards. There was a shared cultural model in which home and school had similar values about the role of literacy and the role of authority (Gee, 2001).

Although Jennifer was successful in school by the standards of almost everyone close to her, the purposes for reading and writing were mostly limited to fulfilling school assignments. She did not view herself, nor did others view her, as particularly creative or extraordinary, but she was clearly successful. The authoritative voice of Bakhtin (1981) resonates in the case of Jennifer because of the ways in which she assimilated voices from home and school. The purposes of literacy did not seem to extend beyond the classroom bounds, but literacy, especially in the case of letter writing, did serve as a means to connect home and school, because she could communicate her daily activities to me and to others.

## Lucas: Resisting Classroom Norms Through Avoidance

Lucas was from a working-class home where Spanish was the primary language spoken; he was considered ESL and had received some help at school. Lucas lived with his mother, stepfather, 4-year-old sister, and baby brother. His mother stayed at home and his stepfather worked as a welder. Lucas enjoyed time that he spent with an aunt who took him shopping and allowed him to make choices while shopping.

Lucas described himself as "not a very good student" and believed the teachers would describe him as "not very smart." He believed his parents compared him to his cousins who made better grades than he did. Several of his peers noted that he was not a good student. His teacher agreed with this assessment, suggesting that he was not motivated, received straight Fs on his report card, and was in danger of failing fifth grade. His teacher seemed to think that his lack of success was rooted in a lack of motivation. She also found that he was socially immature, silly, and often got into trouble.

Lucas was somewhat aware of the effect he had on others. He described an incident in which he had pulled the emergency exit on the bus causing the bell to ring. He said, "then the little bell rang and I was in trouble," but he saw this as an example of being "curious." He also thought that one of his teachers would describe him as "a real active kid." He saw himself as a "wild" child because he liked to climb trees and he had often fallen down, and felt that his parents would describe him as "a crazy person." Indeed, his peers noticed his active nature. One student said, "He likes to play around" while another found him to "like action." Although some students found his activity level "funny," several girls were not amused by it, describing him as "annoying" and "irritating." His teacher suggested that his classroom behavior consisted of "wandering around and goofing off, playing slapstick funny in the room." Lucas felt that he could relate to the character of Little Man in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* because, "he's always acting silly, like me, and always acting crazy."

## Literacy Practices

There was a great deal of consensus that Lucas was not a good reader or writer. He said he was "not a very good reader," and he knew this because "on my report cards and progress reports I don't get really good grades on them." He thought that his parents saw him as a slow reader who did not use a lot of expression: "I don't act like real readers do, like teachers and how they read and stuff." His peers noted that he was not a good reader and that he was usually talking during reading time. His teacher's only comment about his reading was, "He doesn't read." She also remarked that he did not write and that his handwriting was very difficult to read,

> [He] writes like a first grader except I can't read his handwriting. It's definitely not a language barrier. His pages will be kind of spotty, chicken scratches here and there on a page. He does it all at the end in an hour—whole months' worth in an hour.

Lucas agreed that his handwriting was difficult to read and remarked that it was "sloppy."

Although Lucas noted that he was not a good reader, he also said that he read more than his parents did at home. He said his parents read to him some when he was younger, but no one currently read to him. Because he had to read 30 minutes a night for homework, he chose material about NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and outer space to read before he went to sleep. Lucas said that when he was younger, he copied poems and other things from books using a typewriter, but the typewriter had broken and it was not enjoyable to copy them by hand. Although not much reading went on at home according to Lucas, family members occasionally wrote to his grandmother in El Paso, Texas. Lucas liked the class activity in which students wrote letters to each other because "it's fun; it's better than reading journal." He read aloud the following letter, which he wrote to another student:

> Dear Emerald, As soon as I got home from school, I went to my cousin's house, Omar. Then we went to Sonic on our bike…by our house on the bikes. When we got there, Omar ordered a frito pie. Then I ordered a chicken strip dinner. It was good. Then I went home on my bike. It was real fun.

Another letter he read aloud followed a similar format of reporting his activities of the day:

> Dear Valen, I will tell you what I did yesterday. First of all, I went to the playground at 2:55 and got a snack from Mr. Tamez. It was good. Then I went to my two classes, and my dad picked me up at 5:15. Then we went home, ate Ms. Le Blanc's yummy recipe, and took a shower, and got ready for bed, and went to bed.

Although Lucas resisted classroom expectations by refusing to read the Reading Renaissance books, by playing around during reading time, and by failing, he also developed some interesting adaptive strategies. For example, he stated that when selecting a book to read, he always read page 13; if it was interesting, he checked out the book. However, Lucas did not see a purpose in his life for reading—it did not seem to help him attain the things he wanted. His orientation toward reading was for points rather than for enjoyment or learning information. He said, "I am trying to keep up on my reading because I am failing. Trying to read more every night and more in the classroom. Trying to check out books that have higher points." He went on to explain his rationale for choosing a book titled *Adventure in Legoland* (Matas, 1992): "It is worth more points and it is shorter. [Teacher: Do you think about length?] It does not matter as long as it has the points. I always go to the [chart] and see the points." Lucas's comments suggest that he had not given up on school and that he sought to improve his reading; however, his reasons for reading were limited to the notion of obtaining points.

## Summary

Lucas was limited by his own perceptions and those of others that he was a poor reader, by lack of resources at home for school literacy practices (e.g., the typewriter had broken and the teachers had difficulty establishing contact with the parents), and by a narrowed view of the purposes of reading (reinforced by the school reading program) as an activity only for obtaining points. The classroom curriculum clearly influenced him, constraining his potential to become a reader who sees wider purposes for reading, and possibly, preventing him from becoming a competent reader because he received little help within the classroom to work on strategies. Like many of the second language students Reyes (1991) describes in process-writing classrooms, Lucas may have been limited by not receiving enough explicit skills instruction in either reading or writing. Here we see the local, institutional, and societal forces all contributing to Lucas's struggles (Fairclough, 1989). At the classroom level, he received little help to learn the skills necessary to read and write in English. At the institutional level of the school, he was limited by the Reading Renaissance program that allowed access to a narrow range of books and evaluated a narrow range of specific comprehension abilities. Because Lucas was a newly arrived ESL student whose family had few economic resources, he was limited at the societal level. The combined forces made it difficult for Lucas to succeed as a reader and writer. As a student in a less powerful position, his contributions were continually constrained at every level (Fairclough, 1989).

Despite Lucas's struggle with reading and writing, he was aware of the difficulties, and he felt "pretty proud to come to school because a lot of people don't have chances to come to school." He saw that his resistance was not paying off, he was motivated to do better, and he seized opportunities to express his ideas when provided a more authentic venue in the classroom, such as writing letters to classmates. Yet Lucas faced many obstacles in becoming a competent reader and writer, and seemed to be on the losing end of the social struggle for power or even some recognition in the classroom.

Whereas Lucas did not seem to have access to what was considered normal and natural in this classroom (Gee, 2001), and he resisted many of the classroom literacy practices, another student, Daniel, embraced them. Like Lucas, Daniel was Latino from a working-class background; however, Daniel was a fluent English speaker who was born in the United States. Yet Daniel experienced his own set of conflicts in developing a voice that would allow him to insert his ideas about social justice into classroom assignments and to go beyond the teacher's expectations.

## Daniel: Transforming Classroom Norms Through Writing

Daniel was the older of two children from a single-parent family. His mother was Latina and his younger sister was biracial—African American and Latina. English was the primary language spoken in the home, although everyone understood Spanish. Daniel's mother had worked in a law office and wanted Daniel to become a lawyer, because she met "a lot of nice lawyers that did civil rights." She hoped that he would graduate from college "because in our family no one has graduated high school. I went to community college, and I was the first in my family. I want Daniel to see that it's not impossible because we don't have money." His mother had to quit the law office to spend more time with her children, and she was now making ends meet by working at a department store and substitute teaching.

Daniel's mother placed a high value on education, in part because she dropped out of high school when she became pregnant with Daniel, but went back to community college. She said,

> I try to stress with Daniel and [his sister] how important education is. It makes the difference between success and failure. We're not living in a great place, but we make it. We don't get help from welfare, and I think it has to do with the fact that I did get it [education], even though it is just a 2-year degree.

Daniel felt quite close to his family, saying, "My family always sticks together; we try to help my grandpa. I'm close to my cousins in Houston. We celebrate Christmas. We help each other with problems." One of the important events in his life had been his sister's birth because "finally [there was] somebody to share everything with and to

110

have fun with." His mother found opportunities to go to school and have lunch with Daniel. She reported that Daniel said, "Mom, when are you gonna come back?" after sharing lunch in the cafeteria.

Daniel's mother described him as both cautious and curious. She explained that when "he was taking his first steps, he wouldn't walk until he was sure he could walk. He's very cautious." On the other hand, she found him to be

> unique, he's not your typical kid. He's a thinker and writer. He probably challenges her [his teacher] with different questions. He's always been very, very curious. That's his nature. He wants to know everything and sometimes it gets frustrating because it's like question after question.

The teacher did find Daniel to be "an interesting young man." However, she found him to be "too serious...he's very hard on himself. He sets high expectations for himself. He's in tears almost every day about grades, about school." She also noted that adult approval was important to Daniel, especially pleasing his mother. The teacher shared that Daniel had been very depressed and had not been able to get out of bed because he was so hard on himself. His mother did not mention Daniel's depression, but did note that he had a horrible time in a previous school. The previous teacher had suggested Ritalin for hyperactivity and explained to Daniel's mother that most of the boys in the class were on it—not to worry. The doctor had prescribed Ritalin based on the teacher's recommendation. However, Daniel's mother went to the library and read up on Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD):

> I had never heard of ADD; I went to the library and I checked out 10 books, and I went through them. I went through the symptoms, and I was like, this is not my child. That is not the imaginative, creative son I know. I didn't put him on the medication, and the next year we went to [this school], and he excelled.

Apparently Daniel was not depressed around his peers. They described him as "funny" because he told jokes, "nice" because he shared things, and "friendly." Daniel was quite serious in his conversations with me and compared himself to a "ram because I'm real stubborn, and I have a lot of courage and faith and hope when I need it." He went on to explain that when his grandmother died, "I really needed to use it [courage] to help my family and me." He also described himself as "energetic" because he liked to run, "talkative," and "happy." It is interesting to note that Daniel said, "I barely get sad or down." He also seemed to have a strong sense of self-esteem, something his mother stressed and felt that she had not had enough of as a child. In a letter to me, Daniel wrote a poem that read,

> I wish I was an astronaut
> I wish I was a bird
> I wish I was a pirate
> with a big and shiny sword,
> but what ever I wish for
> I am happy being me.

## Literacy Practices

Literacy was highly valued by Daniel and his mother. His mother talked about reading daily, mentioning that she often skipped "from book to book." Daniel was aware of his mother's interest in literacy and said she read

> everything—books and magazines and the newspaper. She writes to people that are in other cities or states. She likes to write things, poems and little stories, and she takes them to everybody else in our family and they read it.

Daniel shared this love of literacy. He stated, "I like to read a lot. I've always liked reading [since] the first time I picked up a book." He went on to explain that he read in class and at home as well as on trips: "I go to Houston to visit aunts and uncles, and I read in the car going there. Whenever I want to, I read." He was aware that he was a good reader, saying "A lot of people say I'm good too." He knew that his mother and his teacher shared the view that he was an excellent reader. Each of his peers responded that Daniel was either the best reader in the class or one of two best readers. His mother explained that he had shown an interest in reading at a young age.

It was Daniel's writing that set him apart from his peers. Each of his peers stated that Daniel was a very good writer and mentioned that the teacher often had him read his work aloud. His peers found his stories to be very interesting, especially the ones that had scary parts. The teacher described him as "a writer." She said,

> I think he sees himself as a strong leader and writer. I hope he does anyway. He really shined (sic) when we did our black history packets…the kids wanted him to read the packet front to back and they were asking for his autograph because they said, "One day he's gonna be a famous author."

Not only did Daniel write at school, he also wrote at home because he had more time. He said, "that's where [home] I write most of my stories and poems. And I read to other people in my family." His mother noted his interest in writing as well: "He likes to write poems. He shares that with me, and he likes to write short stories, mostly like sci-fi. It's like inherent in him. He just started doing it without me showing him." He also enjoyed writing fictional stories, as evidenced by his lengthy story about his cousin's frightening encounter with a wolf.

Daniel used his reading and writing skills to express his views of current events and, in this way, went beyond school expectations. The teacher had provided students with the opportunity to write about the tragic school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, and he wrote the following:

> Trenchcoat Man Massacre
>
> In Colorado there was gunfire. 25 people died in this horrible massacre. It took place in a school there were two people shooting with semi-automatic guns. After the shooting they killed themselves. It lasted 4 hours.
>
> I feel like most people cannot be trusted. How can people be so deadly. The thought that it happened in a school frightens me. What if this happens in our school? What would make two people want to run loose in a school and kill people. The other thing is a lot of these people still had a long life ahead of them and the parents must feel bad too.

This piece shows some of Daniel's deep thinking about current issues and the fears that such violence evoked in him. Writing seemed to be an outlet for his emotions that he did not often share in interviews or conversations with others. Although he did participate in classroom discussions, he felt most comfortable writing his responses in the journals and then reading them aloud to classmates. Daniel was clearly affected by the classroom talk about race, and he shared this piece from his journal with me:

> If there were only one race in the entire world, the world would be a boring place. Everybody would be the same race, which means you would wake up every morning and go outside to see the same color of people each and every day. The world would be no fun anymore. Nobody would know the true meaning of color. It would be demolished. The only different life forms would be animals. The everlasting rainbow on earth would be nothing to people. Color matters so much, but not in the way

> of hate, but life on earth. People should be glad there is a rainbow. Blacks, whites, yellow, copper, red and many other colors are the colors that keep life moving. Without them, the world is hopeless. But with them, the world is truly beautiful. That is why one race would be so dull.

This piece was not written as part of a classroom assignment, but the teacher allowed him to read it to the entire class. He took the opportunity to make his private ruminations more public.

### Summary

Daniel's identity was closely tied to being a successful and avid reader and writer. Both home and school contexts provided him with an audience, as well as many opportunities to create stories and to write about issues of concern to him. Rather than just doing school assignments, Daniel seized opportunities to write about issues that were important to him, such as the above piece. His writing reflects Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "internally persuasive discourse" (p. 345), because he drew from other sources to create something new. Although his reading and writing activities were public, he kept to himself and seemed to be more private about his home life and past struggles. He seemed to act differently with his peers than with adults, who saw a deep, reflective side to him. These conflicts may have provided an impetus to transform his experiences though writing. Daniel's struggles to establish a variety of literacy practices in different contexts links to Sarup's (1996) belief that aspects of individuals' identities may clash in particular spaces. For Daniel, the classroom was a place where his literate and other identities both blended and clashed, but allowed him opportunities to transform his identities.

## What Might These Cases Mean for Understanding Students' Identities as Readers and Writers?

Students in this classroom, which featured reading and writing workshops as well as the Reading Renaissance program, responded to the curriculum in different ways. Jennifer did not question the classroom norms and sought to be successful within them; Lucas wanted to be successful in school but was limited by classroom, institutional, and societal constraints and undermined his own attempts by playing around or not reading; and Daniel complied, but also found opportunities to write about issues of interest to him such as racial prejudice. Jennifer completed assignments and was very successful in school, and found no reason to question or challenge school expectations. When connecting novel themes to her own life, she did so at a literal level that successfully addressed the questions but did not go beyond them. Lucas, by contrast, was a student who struggled to read and write, and resisted the process as well. Although he found an audience—a friend to correspond with in the school-sponsored activity of writing letters—he did not seem to have a larger audience of friends, the teacher, or family with whom to use literacy in meaningful contexts. Purposes of reading and writing seemed to be limited to school tasks, and he was not successful at performing them. Institutional forces, including his lack of access to the language of power, seemed to play a large role in preventing him from succeeding, while his own resistance seemed to contribute to his lack of success in school. Daniel, who was perceived as a good reader and writer and a complex person by teacher and peers, was able to transform the classroom norms to suit his own purposes. He found audiences both in school and out of school and used writing not only to communicate, but to reflect on his own views of violence and race relations. Rather than simply fulfilling classroom assignments, Daniel sought opportunities to write about his feelings and share them with others. The support he received from his teacher and his mother seemed to play a clear role in promoting his literate identity and encouraging him to communicate and transform his own experiences.

The cases demonstrate how students negotiated their identities in different contexts (Gee, 2001). All three had a set of literate practices that influenced how they related to different people. For Jennifer, home and school expectations were quite aligned, and she was able to demonstrate her literacies in both contexts. Although Daniel kept many aspects of himself more private, the complexity of his literate practices is noteworthy. He was supported at home as well as at school in pursuing his interests in reading and writing. Although Lucas did not seem successful in this classroom, he had clearly obtained some strategies for book selection and for communicating with peers. Given the challenges that he had in the classroom, Lucas, too, had developed literate practices that defined who he was. In all three examples we can see the relationships between literacy and identity and the complex ways in which they informed one another (Holdaway, 1986).

The three cases of the students at Valley School demonstrate the powerful effect of institutionalized curriculum on students' identities The language arts curriculum in this fifth-grade classroom was multifaceted, both in terms of the explicit programs and the implicit messages derived from the competing norms. Although some aspects of the curriculum were quite prescribed, such as Reading Renaissance with its color coding, tests, and reward systems, other aspects such as literature response and writing workshop allowed students opportunities to see reading and writing as more than a set of classroom exercises. The influence of Reading Renaissance is clear from seeing that the students evaluated their reading abilities and interests in terms of what color they were on in the schoolwide program. They rated themselves against others and developed strategies for taking tests and thus gaining points. In contrast, the reading workshop provided opportunities for students to become engaged in texts through listening, discussing, and writing responses. The teacher had sought to address issues of racial discrimination and tension through literature, and students were able to discuss their understandings of the themes of the book both in classroom discussions and in interviews. Yet, the response to the novel tasks were somewhat prescribed; although the questions asked students to connect the books to their lives, they did so in particular ways such as describing a challenge or a time they felt jealous. These tasks corresponded in some ways to the TAAS skills and provide evidence of the ways in which the teacher felt pressured to prepare her students for the tests. Here, we see the discourse of the teacher was as constrained as the students' by the institutional effects of a particular program and the focus on testing (Fairclough, 1989).

Students such as Jennifer and Daniel were able to successfully negotiate the different tasks and expectations within the classroom. However, quite different expectations for each of the curricular areas may have posed particular challenges for students such as Lucas. Although there were choices about books to read within the prescribed curriculum and some opportunities for open-ended responses, Lucas seemed to need much more instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies than was being provided. Having him read in isolation and testing him on a narrow range of comprehension questions only seemed to compound his problems and did not seem to provide him access to full classroom participation. As a result, he seemed to have a narrowed view of the purposes of reading and writing, and in the end, he had few choices.

The findings that the classroom curriculum had a powerful effect on the students have some implications for practice. First, students who identify themselves as readers primarily in terms of a color scheme could develop a limited view of reading—seeing reading as a means to gain points or win prizes rather than a process to aid them in acquiring information (see Sailors, Worthy, Assaf, & Mast, 2000). Second, there is also the danger of reducing complex literacy skills and strategies to a single dimension and suggesting to students that literacy is equal to a color on a chart. These consequences suggest that schools need to be careful about the imposition of particular programs on all teachers and students (Biggers, 2001). The risks of a standardized program seem to outweigh the rewards.

Not only were the students affected by the curriculum, but it is clear that the teacher was pressured into teaching in ways that she found offensive. In the teacher's view the institutional norm of using the program, posting students' scores, and having reward parties affected how they saw themselves as literacy learners and had harmful effects on both high and low achievers. Being a "Model School for Reading Renaissance," as well as preparing students for the TAAS tests, affected how the teacher conducted her classroom and her views of curriculum. Here we see in a rather specific way how a teacher operated within social and institutional boundaries as well as her own cultural milieu (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). Given the intense pressures the teacher experienced, it seems remarkable that she was able to negotiate the curricular terrain and provide opportunities for students to explore their literate identities in a number of contexts.

## CHAPTER 5

# Understanding Students Within Their Social Contexts

Although these nine cases of students are specific to their sites, the cases also represent a larger picture of teaching and learning in U.S. classrooms. What emerges from the analyses is an image of complex interactions between teachers and students in which students are continually negotiating who they are within culturally inscribed spaces. Although each child responded to the classroom setting in a different way, themes emerged across the three sites: the influence of power and authority as communicated through the teacher's role and classroom curriculum, issues of purposes and audiences for writing, and the need for creating spaces within existing classrooms. In this concluding chapter, I compare students' constructions of literate identities, analyze the classroom contexts that influenced students, and suggest some implications for practice.

## Comparing Students' Constructions of Literate Identities

Although students interacted in specific ways with their teachers and peers, there were also some commonalties among students who appropriated, resisted, or transformed their classroom contexts. The following comparison across sites provides some insight into how students engaged in complex negotiations with regard to their literacy learning and identity construction.

## Appropriation of Classroom Norms

Miguel, Rita, and Jennifer were all successful in appropriating the classroom norms and expectations. They conformed to the teacher's rules, whether it was writing from personal experience, writing summaries of novels, or reading within the accepted range of Accelerated Reading books. Miguel generally conformed to the teacher's instructions; for example, he used sticky notes to mark his writing as he had been taught by the teacher, he used index cards to mark vocabulary he wanted to learn, and he wrote journal entries in accordance with the teacher's expectations. Miguel internalized what he had learned from the teacher and the classroom and had applied the information about writing for an audience, writing from personal experience, and using description in his own writing. Rita, too, was very conscious of pleasing the teacher. She wrote journal entries about her life, summarized the books read aloud, and attempted to include descriptive language in her work. Jennifer excelled in the reading program and fulfilled all her assignments. She was strategic about moving ahead through the reading levels, and she sought her teacher's approval.

Each student had developed a strong relationship with the teacher and found his or her work valued and supported in the classroom context. Ms. Meyer respected Miguel's work and appreciated his contributions. She felt very positive toward him, describing him as "the greatest kid," and her interactions, particularly in writing conferences, continually encouraged him. Likewise, Rita's teachers encouraged her to fit into the classroom and to develop her writing in Spanish and English. Although she never felt comfortable enough to share her writing with the large class, she did have opportunities to demonstrate her language and literacy competence in both languages. Jennifer, highly regarded by Ms. Le Blanc, became the teacher's errand girl and the person she could count on at all times.

Authority figured largely in students' relationships with teachers and with literacy practices. Miguel viewed his teacher as the primary influence on his writing and valued her input. When he struggled to find a topic for his project, he felt that she saved him and helped him see that he wanted to compare himself to a killer whale. He reported that she had opened new horizons for him and helped him by meeting with him in conferences and modeling descriptive writing in the classroom. Rita also wanted to please the teacher and had internalized the idea that if she followed the teacher's rules, she would get ahead like her sister. Her attitudes toward authority were consistent with those at home. Although her family members, who had emigrated from Mexico, were not happy with some of the school literacy practices, they expected Rita to follow the school rules. Jennifer, too, had a fairly straightforward relationship with authority—attending to her work allowed her to be free to do errands for the teacher and to gain acceptance. Her father reinforced the value of doing well in school by rewarding her for good grades.

From a perspective that values students' understanding and applying school norms, these students were very successful. They had figured out how to play the game of school and had used available resources to fit into U.S. classrooms. From a cultural reproductive stance (Bourdieu, 1977), these students were acquiring the cultural capital to help them succeed in monetary ways in the future. The three students, all Latino from working-class backgrounds, occupied particular subject positions in their classrooms—they were in less powerful positions than the teacher because they were students from economic and social circumstances that did not privilege them. Yet, they participated in classroom norms and, in a sense, reproduced those norms by consenting to the teachers' authority and fulfilling their expected social roles (Fairclough, 1989).

From a more critical perspective in which schools ought to do more than simply reinforce existing values, these students were missing out (Giroux, 1988). They viewed reading and writing as tools for fulfilling classroom assignments rather than as opportunities to extend beyond school or to transform their worlds in some way. Miguel was satisfied with his killer whale project because he was able to combine his knowledge of whales with the expectation to write a personal narrative. Rita was able to combine her facilities with both Spanish and English to contribute to a group fashion show on ancient Egypt. Jennifer completed her assignments to move up in the Accelerated Reading program. These students enacted the broader discourse patterns of schooling in which teachers have power and authority, and the students submit to it without questioning those relationships (Giroux, 1988).

Audiences for literacy behaviors sometimes included students' families, but these students generally saw reading and writing as a means to improve themselves in school. Miguel wrote for peers at school because students were expected to share their work in writing workshop, but he cared deeply about the teacher's opinion. Miguel viewed good writing as going hand-in-hand with being a good student; Rita did not choose to read or write out of school, unless forced by her mother; and Jennifer, who had an early interest in reading and writing, had become more interested in other pre-teenage activities. Their views of reading and writing and their related identities as readers and writers will probably help them to continue to achieve in school. These students have overcome challenging economic and social circumstances—that is, being Latino and working class in a predominantly white and middle-class society—gaining access to the codes of power (Delpit, 1988). Their efforts, supported by parents and teachers, should be lauded. However, their success with schooling may inhibit them from changing a system that for the most part worked for them but may oppress others who were not as successful in the system (Bourdieu, 1977).

## Resisting Classroom Expectations

The three students whom I have described as resisting classroom expectations challenged the dynamics of the classroom either through "acts of open opposition" or through subtler acts (Dressman, 1997, p. 38). Although Greg and Lucas refused to participate in certain classroom activities, Anita shifted the assignment in a more subtle act of opposition. They all seemed to find their classrooms oppressive, but for quite different reasons and with different consequences. In each case, a complex network of misunderstandings, personal factors, cultural mismatches, and larger institutional forces seemed to be operating. Anita and Ms. Meyer had a rocky relationship that affected the ways in which Anita interacted in the classroom. Although Anita did not share her writing in the large group or with peers, she did attempt to explain her topic and interest to the teacher in a conference. When Ms. Meyer did not support her topic choice or her narrative style, Anita initially resisted and was going to stick with her original topic. Even though she changed topics, her work was never really valued by the teacher because it did not reflect the teacher's value on description, metaphor, and exploration of an intimate personal relationship. Her working-class social status, her ethnicity—different from the teacher's—and her lack of academic success appeared to work against her; at the same time, Ms. Meyer perpetuated the image of Anita as an unsuccessful writer and did little to help her find her voice. The discourse enacted in the writing conference displayed the difference in power between the teacher and Anita, as the teacher continually tried to control the conference. Besides the personal factors that influenced their relationship, we can see the institutional forces in which the "white middle-class gatekeeper," Ms. Meyer, constrained the discourse type (Fairclough, 1989, p. 47).

Greg's interactions with his teachers were complex. Although Ms. Martin and Ms. Allen valued his extensive knowledge of history and other fields, allowing him to respond to questions they asked during large-group read-alouds, they were uncomfortable with his refusal to participate in the expected way. They wanted Greg to participate in literacy activities during the scheduled times, to pay attention during novel time, to raise his hand and be called on before speaking, and to wait his turn to share. These expectations are fairly typical in U.S. classrooms, and Greg would have fit in better had he cooperated; however, Greg resisted through his behavior and, occasionally, through not writing at all during response time. The consequence was that he was often in conflict with his teachers and with his peers, who saw his resistance as disrupting their literacy opportunities. Greg, equipped with a great deal of cultural capital from home (Bourdieu, 1977), continued to write about war in his journals and took pride in including blood and gore in his stories. However, his form of resistance seemed to create a great deal of unresolved tension and discomfort, resulting in school as an oppressive force.

Lucas, who lacked the cultural capital and resources afforded to Greg, resisted working in his classroom setting as well. He did not have the facility in written English to participate fully, and he did not seem to be getting the help he needed. The curriculum of Reading Renaissance, in which students were expected to read and answer questions on their own, contributed to his failure. Because he had not acquired the basics of decoding and comprehension, simply having him take tests on materials he could not understand was not going to help him attain the necessary skills. Additionally, although listening to stories read aloud might have provided him with some opportunities to hear spoken English and to participate in discussions, the fact that Lucas was not receiving adequate instruction in texts he could read limited his access to literacy. For his part, Lucas essentially refused to read during the scheduled time, choosing to play and avoid work. His peers noted his lack of participation, and although many liked him, they attributed his difficulties to his own off-task behavior. The dynamic of institutional forces such as the Reading Renaissance program, the lack of support for his learning to read and write in English in the classroom, and his working-class new-immigrant status combined in ways that prevented his success in the classroom (Fairclough, 1989). For his part, Lucas's lack of participation prevented him from changing the dynamics in the classroom in any productive ways (Foley, 1990).

The interplay of the oppressive classroom settings and the students' resistance limited their literacy experiences within the classroom, but may not have limited their access to other forms of literacy in other settings. Anita did not share her work with a classroom audience, but she created opportunities to perform other literate identities through her journals and her singing and dancing on the train with a different audience. Greg wrote many interesting pieces in his journal, but the teachers did not respond to them or provide opportunities for him to share his written work in the classroom. As a result, Greg's extensive knowledge of World War II and the Civil War was largely unexplored by the teachers or his peers. However, Greg did have a receptive audience at home, and he continued to work on expressing his ideas in a variety of formats. At the same time as the Reading Renaissance curriculum and the read-alouds failed to address Lucas's specific needs, his reluctance to participate in the classroom activities limited his classroom literacy opportunities. Instead of attaining fluency in written and spoken English, he was falling behind. The writing that he had done at home was not supported continually at home and went unacknowledged in school. Reading and writing did not serve a purpose for him in his daily life, and at the same time, his lack of these tools was preventing him from being successful in school. Yet Lucas had developed literate strategies, such as book selection and writing to an audience of a friend, which provided him with some opportunities for attaining literacy.

In the three cases, students demonstrated resistance to classroom activities, but not to literacy per se. They found ways to enact their literate identities outside the classroom boundaries. Anita found an audience on the train, Greg continued his reading and writing at home, and Lucas found a friend with whom to correspond. They were able to find sources outside the classroom and other ways to represent themselves. Their identities were not totally constituted by the classroom settings, rather they took up different positions depending on the contexts (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Hagood, in press). Although they did not fit the cultural model established by the teachers and their behavior was considered deviant in some ways (Gee, 2001), these students all wanted to succeed in school. These were not students who had given up and withdrawn; instead, they continued to try to find ways to gain acceptance in their classroom settings. Anita switched topics, trying to please the teacher; Greg continued to give answers in large-group sessions; and Lucas sought to try harder to complete his homework. However, their current settings did not seem to provide hope for change: Anita's relationship with the teacher seemed doomed to failure, Greg did not see a reason to change his behavior, and Lucas needed more assistance in the basics of reading and writing. The students seemed to have little power to change their circumstances, and their own resistance only seemed to make matters worse. If these patterns of challenges are continued in school, these students may not succeed in attaining schooled literacy. However, their literate identities within other contexts may have provided them with resources to meet the demands in other settings. Although they were constrained by their social positions (in the cases of Anita and Lucas) and by institutional barriers, they were still social agents who were "active and creative," who could "meet the ever-changing demands and contradictions of social situations" in new ways (Fairclough, 1989, p. 39).

## Transforming Expectations Through Text

The students who transformed their identities as readers and writers were able to resist certain classroom expectations and "get away with it." Their attempts as active, creative social agents to change their classroom settings in some way were more successful than those of their resistant counterparts. That is, they each changed some aspect of their literacy practices or their classroom environments that resulted in creating a third space (Gutierrez et al., 1995). This third space involved the teacher and student understanding one another and engaging in active problem solving. For example, Ella and Ms. Meyer worked specifically on Ella's project after developing a shared understanding in a writing conference of the exact nature of the project. However, the creation of a third space did not necessarily occur in a one-on-one, teacher-student interaction. Mandy raised her concerns to Ms. Martin and Ms. Allen in class discussion about the gendered nature of the writing assignment and continued to raise the issue in subsequent assignments. The teachers recognized Mandy's concern and allowed her views to become part of the legitimate curriculum. Daniel seized opportunities outside the actual assignments to share his work with others. He used the study of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976) and slavery to issue his own proclamation about the value of diversity in society. Ms. Le Blanc contributed to the development of the third space by allowing Daniel to write the piece instead of another assignment and encouraging him to share it with the whole class.

The result of the creation of a third space was that students created a "hybrid voice" (Fecho, 2001, p. 10). For Ella, that meant literally to superimpose her fictional voice onto her personal narrative. Instead of just writing a letter to her aunt recounting past experiences, she drew from her resources to create a story that is "half truth-half fiction." She was able to include fictional elements that she so highly valued by writing a story in the first person (meeting the teacher's expectations), yet adding a variety of endings (her own fictional voice). Ella made use of the dialogue from the classroom and developed her classroom writing assignment into a piece for an audience, her aunt. She had the knowledge and experience with using different genres that allowed her to create this hybrid. Although she did not directly challenge the teacher's authority, she found a way to combine her own interests with the teacher's expectations.

Mandy's hybrid voice manifested itself through her writing voices that were "half hers and half others'" (Bakhtin, 1981). She inserted herself into the book characters and had them express some of her own concerns about treatment of people of color. She developed flexibility with genres that allowed her to adapt to different situations, while writing from a female perspective. She also attempted to write a story with characters from diverse backgrounds, thereby imbuing her work with a sense of social justice. Daniel also used his writing to express his views of diversity, inequity, and social justice. His hybrid voice reflected some of the discussions held in the classroom, but went beyond them to argue for valuing diversity.

The development of a hybrid voice occurred through some conflict between the classroom expectations and the students' interests. In Ella's case, the teacher did not want her to write fiction. Instead of simply complying with or ignoring the teacher's expectation, Ella adjusted the assignment to fit her own interests. Mandy raised her concern about having to write from a male perspective, and the teachers responded by altering the assignment. Mandy developed the flexibility to write from a variety of points of view. Further, she was struck by her observations of the inequities in the workplace and looked for ways to address her concerns. With Daniel, the conflict seemed distant in time and relationship. In some ways he was still struggling with previous teachers' perceptions of him as a student with ADD and a behavior problem. Yet his more immediate struggle seemed to be with finding ways to express his strong feelings about racial injustice and school violence. These students were able to capitalize on the conflicts with teachers to write for audiences and purposes beyond the classroom and to develop broader views of reading and writing.

The students who attempted to transform aspects of their identities or the classroom norms did so through their classroom literate practices. Ella, Mandy, and Daniel were very successful students by school standards; they achieved high grades, the teachers thought highly of them, and they all were motivated to do well in school. The students' work was well accepted by the teachers and their peers. All found opportunities to share their work in the classroom setting, and peers usually responded positively to their work. They had developed shared cultural models with the teachers about what literacy practices were expected (Gee, 2001).

Yet they also went beyond the classroom expectations. Ella, Mandy, and Daniel used literacy for broader purposes than the classroom. All three read voraciously and widely at home and all wrote stories at home as well as at school. Ella kept her fictional notebook for her own purposes; Mandy entered writing contests in her spare time; Daniel wrote pieces at home too. Students' home literacy experiences reinforced much of what was going on at school. Although Ella's teacher did not want her to write fiction for her assignment, she certainly applauded the idea of writing in and outside the classroom and sharing her work with real audiences. Mandy's mother, who served dual roles as parent and teacher, nurtured her daughter's home literacy habits and, at the same time, kept her teachers well informed about her experiences. Daniel shared much of his work with his mother, developing an audience beyond the classroom and creating continuity between home and school. Students who were able to transform their contexts were active in negotiating their identities within school and other contexts and drew from several discourses to create new texts (Fairclough, 1989). The students anticipated a form of critical literacy in which learners are able to see the relevance of reading and writing in their everyday lives, but also to interrogate texts, and to see themselves as active participants in the transformation of their own multiple identities (Luke, 2000).

## Understanding Students' Backgrounds

The focus of this study was on students' construction of their literate identities. However, it is neither possible—nor desirable—to separate who these students were as readers and writers from the social contexts in which those identities were formed. The fact that Anita was African American and working class seemed to affect her teacher's perceptions of her, while at the same time, Anita's style of representing her experiences was unfamiliar to the teacher. Ella was also African American, but she was middle class, which may have given her access to literate practices in her home that were congruent with school expectations. Miguel and Rita, both Latino immigrants who were competent English speakers despite having been in the United States for only a few years, were remarkable in how much they had achieved in adapting to U.S. schools. Yet, Lucas, who was also a recent immigrant, did not have the same access to literacy and was struggling to read and write in English. Greg, armed with middle-class, European American cultural capital from experiences with his parents, was not able to successfully transform those experiences in the classroom setting, while Daniel, who was working-class and somewhat depressed, was able to make his experiences count in the classroom.

What has emerged is a complex picture of the role of race, culture, social class, and gender. These forces interacted in dynamic ways that belie a mere reproductive role of schooling in promoting success or failure (Bourdieu, 1977), and that suggest that teachers and students had agency that they exercised within the local setting. The study, then, becomes an example of the intersection of the various levels of society, institution, and the local classroom through language and text that interact in complex ways (Fairclough, 1992). In the next section, I discuss the local settings of the classrooms and analyze features that contributed to students' views of themselves as readers and writers.

## Analyzing the Classroom Contexts

In this book, I have focused on how students constructed their literate identities within specific classroom contexts. In comparing students across sites, I have found that the teacher-student relationship and the classroom curriculum have played major roles in contributing to students' understandings of who they are as readers and writers. These classrooms were, in turn, part of larger institutions and social forces that influenced how the teachers enacted literate practices (Giroux, 1988).

### Teacher-Student Relationships

The nine cases I have described highlight the importance of the teacher-student relationship in influencing literacy learning. Classroom talk, whether through writing conferences, large-group share sessions, or discussion, can serve as a powerful means to enact the teacher-student relationship (Cazden, 1988). In the NYC classroom, Ms. Meyer's views of the students influenced her interactions with them in the classroom and, in particular, affected her writing conferences with them. Her positive interaction with Miguel encouraged him to revise his whale piece by including description and comparing himself to a whale. Her negative feelings about Anita were reflected in the writing conference where teacher and student never reached a shared understanding of the topic. Although Ms. Meyer disapproved of students writing fiction, she had positive images of Ella and expressed interest in her topic of relating personal experiences and her letter to her aunt. While Miguel and the teacher experienced synchrony, Ms. Meyer and Anita experienced unresolved conflict. With Ella, teacher and student reached a shared understanding after experiencing some tension.

In the Hillside School site, Rita made every effort to please all her teachers and was successful despite the fact that she would have preferred other venues in which to share her work. In contrast, Greg continually negotiated his relationship with Ms. Martin and Ms. Allen, sometimes successfully, but often there was tension, and he felt rejected and rebellious. Mandy was well-liked by the teachers and, because she was a successful reader and writer, seemed to have resources to draw from that aided her in expressing her conflicts with the writing assignments. The sharing of response logs during the whole-class sessions was a window for seeing how teachers and students negotiated their relationships.

The natures of the relationships between teacher and students were reflected not only in the teacher's interviews, but also in the ways Ms. Le Blanc responded to the students during Reading Renaissance time and the large-group discussions at Valley School. The teacher had a positive view of Jennifer and provided her with opportunities to help around the classroom and school such as running errands. Jennifer was pleased by this role and accepted the responsibility with enthusiasm. On the other hand, the teacher reacted negatively to Lucas's lack of responsibility in completing his work and struggled with how to help him, seeking assistance from his parents to help him pass fifth grade. Daniel and the teacher had a complex interaction in which she felt that he was depressed and anxious about his work. She enlisted the help of his mother and provided opportunities for him to excel, while at the same time attempting to reduce his anxiety.

In all three settings, we see the continuum from strong, caring relationships in which the teacher and student developed an understanding of each other to situations in which the teacher and student struggled to find common ground. Because all human relationships are complex, it is not surprising that teacher and students experienced conflict as well as congruence. However, the teacher-student relationship affected the access to literacy and influenced how students felt about themselves as readers and writers.

Teachers enacted their relationships with students within the curriculum. At two of the school sites, the teachers were relatively free from district requirements and emphases on test scores, which allowed students blocks of time to read and write or to engage with integrated units. At the third site, Valley School, the teacher combined the school-mandated curriculum, Reading Renaissance, with her own version of reading workshop. The teachers' views about what constituted good writing and effective literacy instruction, developed from their own experiences within the school cultures, influenced their curricular practices.

## Teachers' Enactments of Writing Workshop and Literature-Based Curriculum

The curricular goals at each of the three school sites were consistent with writing workshop and literature-based instruction. The classrooms were student-centered to the extent that teachers assumed nontraditional roles, attempting to facilitate students' reading and writing in contrast to directing all activities. The focus was on the process of writing rather than on conventions. Students had choices about what to read, about topics for writing, or about projects for integrated units, and they were also encouraged to share their work with the teacher and peers (Calkins, 1986; Routman, 1991). Despite the surface appearance of openness and student choice, however, the teachers had implicit assumptions about what constituted effective reading and writing, which had a major impact on how students described themselves as readers and writers. Frequently, the teachers' assumptions contradicted their goals and ideals, opening possibilities for some students while creating dilemmas for others.

The writing workshop in NYC that emphasized writing process rather than conventions, student choice about topics, and writing for real audiences seemed quite enabling for some students. However, the teacher's enactment of the workshop, which included an emphasis on the "qualities of good writing" and writing from personal experience—for instance writing about a "deep and important relationship" as a genre—was a deterrent for some students like Anita. The ways in which the teacher communicated her value of writing about a deep and important topic during writing conferences seemed to be effective for only the students who could "read" her assumptions. However, for other students, like Anita, who did not have experience with writing workshop and who interpreted Ms. Meyer's focus on personal experience as an opportunity to write about experiences at camp, the teacher's stated views (i.e., "Select a topic from your own experience") contradicted her real intentions (i.e., "Write about an important relationship"). These conflicts, which could become the material for deliberation and community-building (Lensmire, 2000), were ignored and left unchallenged.

Likewise at the Hillside School site, the teachers encouraged students to respond openly to books read aloud. However, students' choices here, too, were limited by the teachers' values on what constituted good writing. Writing summaries did not really count—using colorful language and writing from a particular perspective did. Again, some students understood this assumption, while others grappled with the contradiction of writing freely but also pleasing the teacher. Because the journals were read but not responded to, students did not have access to models of the kind of journal writing the teachers valued. Trying to understand the teachers' intentions without being provided specific models was a challenging task for many of the students from diverse backgrounds (Delpit, 1988).

At the Valley School site, the contradictions in expectations for the major curricular topics must have challenged students like Lucas. On one hand, students were encouraged to respond freely to the chapters read aloud, but on the other, they were expected to read books for points and take tests for rewards. Again, some students understood and negotiated the different expectations or altered them to fit their own goals, while students such as Lucas did not operate successfully in either situation. Whereas the contradictions in expectations provided opportunities for some students to find ways to play with or subvert the system, these contradictions may have confused other students (Dressman, 1997).

Although the writing workshops and literature-based instruction opened possibilities for many students, the curriculum also became a "one-size fits all" (Reyes, 1991) situation that did not work for all students. Although the literature has often characterized traditional classroom instruction filled with worksheets and initiate-respond-evaluate (IRE) discourse patterns as limiting (Cazden, 1988), in some ways these classrooms where teachers struggled to teach against the grain, language and learning were still narrowly constructed (Gutierrez et al., 1997). The essential ingredient that seemed to be missing from the classrooms was an underlying value of the knowledge that every student brought to the learning setting (Willis, 1995). In the writing workshop in NYC, the teacher imposed her own views of the value of imagery and description and writing about an important relationship. She did not attempt to build on Anita's knowledge and experience at camp. The teachers at Hillside School allowed Rita to write in English and Spanish, thereby valuing her bilingualism; yet, their choices for books to read aloud to the class did not reflect many of the Latino students' backgrounds. And although they valued Greg's knowledge of the world, the teachers did not build on that knowledge or create opportunities for him to share his knowledge of wars and history. Ms. Le Blanc at Valley School created opportunities for students to relate their own experiences to literature through the questions she asked about text and by explicitly selecting novels that addressed racial issues. However, her text selections did not necessarily reflect the backgrounds of the majority of her students who were Latino, and she had not found a way to develop Lucas's fragile understanding of text. Some students, then, did not have access to "communities as effective practice" (Gutierrez & Meyer, 1995, p. 41) or have opportunities to relate their background knowledge to the texts read (Au, 1991).

All the teachers in the study brought their own assumptions about literacy, learning, and teaching to the classroom settings. Although the teachers were from different states and taught different populations in settings from urban to urban-rural, they shared many of the same assumptions about literacy. They also had many similarities in their backgrounds. Like the majority of teachers in U.S. schools (Sleeter, 1995), these teachers were white, middle class, and spoke English as their native language. They seemed to have a shared cultural model that defined what counted as normal and natural literacy practices and what counted as deviant or inappropriate behaviors in particular settings (Gee, 2001). For example, the teachers seemed to share the assumptions that they were in a position of authority and needed to control the discourse between teacher and students, that the curriculum needed to prepare students for later life (and their positions in the social structure), and that writing was most effective if performed in a particular genre and it contained certain features. However, these were also teachers who wanted to "teach against the grain" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 279) and engage in adventurous teaching (Cohen, 1988); they did not want to perpetuate traditional practices of basal readers, worksheets, testing comprehension, and working individually. They set up environments that allowed students to read and write authentic texts, to engage in meaningful activities, and to share their ideas with one another (Routman, 1991).

Despite their shared models of teaching, these teachers were constrained by larger institutional forces and societal pressures. Students at Hillside and Valley Schools still had to pass the TAAS test; teachers still felt the pressure of providing quality instruction for all students; and teachers were accountable to various audiences including the principal, parents, and the larger communities. Teachers experienced the contradictions between their goals of providing open-ended learning opportunities for all students and the institutional constraints of teaching a large number of students from diverse backgrounds. Like the teachers in McNeil's (1986) study, the teachers responded by controlling students' behavior in classrooms, controlling the tasks, and controlling the discourse. Just as the students were in unequal power positions with them, the teachers also occupied particular social positions that constrained their abilities to transform the curriculum and develop more caring relationships with all the students (Fairclough, 1989; Noddings, 1992).

The analyses of cases demonstrate the complex interplay between students and their settings. The students' identities as literacy learners developed in relation to their social contexts including home and school (Gee, 2001). For some students there was more consistency across their home and school settings, whereas for others, they demonstrated different literate abilities depending on the social support, the nature of the tasks, and the ways in which they positioned themselves relative to the teacher and their peers (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Evans, 1996; McCarthey, 1998). These identities also were constructed in relation to others' perceptions (Tatum, 1997). Students' literate identities were constructed by teachers, parents, and peers in relation to sometimes congruent and sometimes competing expectations from within their racial, cultural, and language discourse communities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Gee, 2001). The conflicts among aspects of students' identities created opportunities for some students who were able to alter the classroom norms and create a third space (Gutierrez et al., 1997), while those conflicts seemed unmanageable for students who experienced particularly oppressive conditions within the classrooms.

Social and institutional forces seemed to create more responsive environments for some students, while those same classrooms were oppressive for others. Race, social class, and linguistic status intersected, creating opportunities for some but limiting other students

(Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). The relationship between power and language was quite complex; there were no straightforward connections between students' linguistic or social status and their literate practices in the classroom. The connections were much more subtle examples of the interplay among discourses, practices, and social positions. The cases are examples of the ways in which individuals made sense of their reality and social positions as the domains of the interactional, ideological, and local intersected through language and text in the classroom. The individual cases demonstrated how the students occupied different subject positions and thus were constrained by particular discoursal rights and obligations, at the same time as they were active and creative, contributing to their relative success or lack of success within the classroom settings (Fairclough, 1989). Appropriation, resistance, and transformation were forms through which students engaged in a dynamic interaction with the classroom and represented their views of literacy. These forms represent the conflicts between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse that Bakhtin (1981) described as arising from the mix of voices we experience in our primary and secondary discourses (Gee, 1990).

Likewise, teachers were situated in particular communities and subject to institutional constraints and social norms; they worked long hours, were generally isolated in their classrooms (except for the team-teaching setting), and had little time for planning (Giroux, 1988). Their white, middle-class status played a role in the ways they established classroom environments and curriculum for their students. They shared cultural models of what was expected in schools, and they shared some expectations about what constituted writing workshop and literature-based instruction (Gee, 2001). The teachers operated within particular contexts and felt compelled to interact in accordance with program or district guidelines, whether it was the expectations to enact Calkins's (1986) writing workshop in a certain way or to be a model for the Reading Renaissance program. Yet, within those institutional constraints, teachers also showed agency in how they adapted models of teaching to fit their own belief systems or combined seemingly contradictory practices for what they hoped would be the learning of their students.

Because classrooms are dynamic settings in which teachers and students are continually negotiating their identities, we need to identify practices that will be sensitive to that complexity and make room for all students. In the following section, I draw from the three sites to suggest some principles for rethinking and revising literacy practices.

## Implications for Practice

Underlying the recommendations I offer is a conception of identity that is fluid, dynamic, and relational (Mishler, 1999), and a view of literacy as a set of cultural practices that can promote democratic and emancipatory change (Freire, 1970). If we are to move away from the old "dead structures" (Lemert, 1997, p. 147) to more transformative practices, we need to consider ways that classrooms might change. Because classrooms are imbedded in larger institutional structures and social settings, we need "to find ways in which the pedagogical can be made more political and the political more pedagogical" (Giroux, 1988, p. 152).

Four major implications follow from this framework and the cross-site analyses. First, I recommend that we (teachers, researchers, teacher educators) reflect on our own assumptions about teaching and learning and, in particular, consider our own images of good writing and assumptions about literacy learning. Second, I emphasize the importance of getting to know particular students within their social and cultural contexts. Third, I recommend that we provide students with choices in a variety of genres to engage in literacy practices for multiple purposes. Fourth, I suggest that we engage students in explicit talk about the changing nature of identity.

### Examining Assumptions and Making Expectations Clear

In each of the settings, teachers had particular views of reading and writing that students were able to understand and apply, resist, or transform. Ms. Meyer believed in the importance of representing important relationships and using imagery and description; the teachers in the multiage, literature-based setting focused on thematic units and taking characters' perspectives in creative ways; and Ms. Le Blanc valued responding to prompts about books. Although all of these seem to be interesting topics for students to explore and the teachers provided rationale for the selection of these topics, the teach-

135

ers did not question whether these might be of value to all students. Is writing about an important person in your life, especially if there is suggestion of abuse, the most valuable topic to explore? Is taking the character's perspective the most effective way to interact with the novel? Is responding to particular questions the best way to relate a book to your life? Ultimately, as teachers we all make decisions about the most valuable topics to explore and the best books to read to achieve our goals. However, it is important to consider *what* and *who* is left out of the curriculum when we make the decisions we do (Sleeter, 1995) and to make efforts to provide inclusive curriculum (Nieto, 2002).

As we consider our choices for books to introduce to students and for topics about which students can write in particular genres, we need to be more cognizant of the powerful effects of our own values on students' literacy development. By virtue of our experience and knowledge, we are always walking the fine line between assisting students to become better readers and writers and imposing our views on them. It seems reasonable, then, for teachers to consider their values and to consider how they might conflict with those from other cultures. Examining our own assumptions about students, curriculum, and power relations is a prerequisite to developing the kinds of curricular opportunities we want for students of diverse backgrounds (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Once we have examined our own assumptions and selected goals, resources, and methods, we need to think carefully about communicating our expectations to students.

If we have specific expectations about what we want students to learn, such as using description, we ought to make those expectations clear to students rather than simply devaluing what they do produce. No doubt, some students will still resist, but at least they will know what is expected rather than having to "read" what the teacher really wants. Likewise, if we want to narrow the writing topics for students, we need to communicate what the appropriate topics are to them. For example, if we do not want students to include violent content, we need to let them know the range of topics that are appropriate. Communicating clearly our expectations can assist particularly those students, such as Anita and Lucas, who may not have access to the "codes of power" (Delpit, 1988, p. 125), but can also promote understanding between teachers and students from all backgrounds.

In our quest to develop understanding, we should not forget that for some students within each site, conflict served as a springboard for change. Embracing conflict by trying to understand its source, whether from a lack of shared background or a misunderstanding about a particular task, can help us understand ourselves in relation to our students. Conflict can serve as the basis for a newer, deeper, and shared understanding that allows students to transform their literate identities. Engaging in dialogue with students, especially those who tend to resist classroom expectations, can provide much information about why a student may be resisting and what conditions underlie his or her behaviors.

Conflict can be set within the larger conversation about the importance of agency and critique. Because we occupy different social positions, conflict and struggle will exist, but these struggles can become the material for interrogating the dominant culture and schooling practices that are representative of it (Giroux, 1988). We can recognize the ways in which we may conflict with a student because of differences in values, roles, or social status and allow these differences to become part of the larger conversation. We need to create spaces in our curriculum where those conversations can occur. One of those places might be in literacy classes where students can have opportunities to talk about language itself.

Fairclough (1989) suggests that increasing consciousness about the role of language in the domination of some groups over others is the first step toward emancipation. He suggests that we need to develop critical language awareness that engages students in purposeful discourse at the same time as they begin to stretch and break conventions. By having students draw from and reflect on their own experiences with others in a systematic way, students can then develop awareness and increasingly purposeful discourse.

## Understanding Students and Relating Curriculum to Their Backgrounds

To avoid creating the one-size-fits-all (Reyes, 1991) curriculum and to make room for the third space (Gutierrez et al., 1997), we need to create literacy experiences that are connected to students' lives. Essential to the process of connecting curriculum and students

137

is to develop an understanding of students' diverse backgrounds. In her study of teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1994) found that the most successful teachers learned a great deal about individual students and about their cultures and then developed culturally relevant curriculum. Learning about students may involve teachers in reading books about cultures other than their own and making home visits to understand the particular students in relation to their families. Like the teachers Moll and Gonzalez (1994) describe in their "funds of knowledge" project, we can increase our knowledge of students' cultures by actively seeking information.

Second, we may use our own understanding of children's lives to provide students with opportunities to connect their experiences to the curriculum. Selecting books that reflect the diverse society and the students' own backgrounds can help students connect literacy to their lives (Harris, 1992). When there are students from several different cultural backgrounds, it seems essential to bring in books that allow students to see members of their own culture represented in positive ways (Au, 1993). Further, teachers can use literature as a springboard to discussing students' own backgrounds as well as to introduce talk about race, class, and gender issues (Athaneses, 1998).

Allowing but not requiring students to write about personal experiences can help them see literacy as a powerful tool to which they can connect their lives and understand the potential of literacy beyond the classroom. Yet, personal experience writing does not have to be the only source of information. Reading and responding to topics of interest to students such as Greg's journals that were filled with facts about World War II also can provide information to teachers and allow students to connect home and school interests. Having students write about issues that they encounter every day or reflecting on catastrophic events such as the Columbine shootings (as Ms. Le Blanc did) or the destruction of the World Trade Center can allow students to read their world as well as the word (Freire, 1970).

Encouraging students to use their home languages can maximize students' learning of concepts, as well as help them feel valued in school (Gutierrez et al., 1997). Allowing students to use their home language, even if the teacher does not understand the words, also can increase teachers' understanding of students' competence with language.

Through listening to students' voices, learning about their backgrounds, and legitimizing their experiences, teachers can help students connect their experiences from in and out of school. Additionally, students can write about what it means to speak another language, affirming their identities as second-language learners (Nieto, 2002).

## Providing Real Choices for Real Audiences

In each of the settings, the teachers offered students choices about writing topics within a particular genre. In each of these settings, however, some students resisted because they wanted to write in another genre. Students in the NYC classroom were encouraged to write about personal relationships using personal narrative and were dissuaded from writing fiction, but some students preferred writing about an experience or writing fiction. Students at Hillside School were expected to adopt the perspectives of a character in a response log, but some wanted to write summaries of the books, write about their personal experiences, or write about war. At Valley School, students were limited to writing responses to books or letter writing but had few opportunities to write from personal experience. These examples suggest that it is important for students to have multiple opportunities to write in many different genres with the expectations made explicit. It is hoped that the opportunity for students to learn about and write in different genres will enable them to have the flexibility to write from different points of view or adopt a variety of stances. Like the student Jeffrey, who Hynes (2000) describes and who favored nonfiction over fiction but became a reader and writer when his interests in car repairs were valued, other students can find their voices when genres other than personal narrative are encouraged.

Even as we offer a multiplicity of opportunities in different genres, we need to be aware of how easily students can be shut down. As Lensmire (2000) points out, "The development of voice can, has, and will go in different directions than becoming. In other words, if becoming suggests an opening up of student voices, it also points to the possibility that they can be shut down" (p. 81). Engaging students in deliberations about their writing and about the values of different genres can elucidate the issues and become part of the ongoing discourse.

In addition to deliberation about the values of differing genres, students also need chances to write for broader audiences. The students who appropriated the classroom expectations viewed literacy as a means for meeting classroom expectations, but not as a tool to help them in other arenas. Further, their audience was usually limited to the teacher. Students who resisted the expectations were limited to a narrow audience, themselves, or an audience outside of school, whereas students who could transform themselves viewed literacy as a tool to communicate with an audience, often beyond the assignment. These differences in purpose and audience suggest that if we want students to see literacy learning as an important element in their lives that goes beyond the classroom, we need to provide them with larger audiences than the teacher or themselves. We need to help students see literacy as a tool for their lives beyond school. By engaging students in writing across different discourse communities, we can help students become aware of differences in values and practices of groups at the same time as they situate themselves within particular communities (McCarthey & Moje, 2002).

## Providing Opportunities for Exploring Identities

In addition to the types of embedded activities discussed here that value students' cultures and background knowledge, I believe it is important to help students explicitly consider identity as a transitional state, one in which we are always engaged (Giroux, 1988; Hagood, in press). For example, we can discuss with students how they might take on different subject positions depending on the context—while at home they may engage in different types of literacy activities than they do at school. Guiding students to consider how they position themselves in certain settings, whether in or out of school, can help them to consider the contextual nature of who they are (Mishler, 1999).

We can communicate to students that they do not have to sacrifice their ethnic, cultural, or language identities to assimilate into the dominant culture, but that they can renegotiate who they are becoming on a continual basis (Nieto, 2002). Providing opportunities for students to read books about youth who are grappling with their changing identities in a variety of realistic contexts can highlight differences in positions and power. Having students articulate "possible selves" while at the same time attending to the differences in power relations can help them to explore the power of hybrid identities (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Rather than silencing those students like Anita, Greg, and Lucas, we can engage them in dialogue about the roots of their resistance and help all students consider the ways in which their attitudes and behaviors might be warranted. Dialogue with students about identity and the ways in which our identities are embedded within larger social contexts can help students see literacy as a set of practices that involve analysis, struggle, and, ultimately, transformation.

## Conclusion

The suggestions described here have in common the need to value and legitimize students' voices by allowing them to read, write, and talk about issues of importance to them. Rather than imposing views of good reading and writing, we need to guide students in learning different perspectives. Together, teachers and students can move toward creating classrooms that allow more students to take transformative stances.

The analyses of the cases demonstrated the interaction between students' developing literate identities and the classroom contexts. In showing this connection, the cases have provided examples of how identity is embedded within social and cultural contexts and demonstrated that language is key to the process of identity construction (Gee, 1990). The role of teachers' and parents' perceptions in shaping identity also has been shown, providing support for Mishler's (1999) theory that identity is relational. The relationships we develop inside and outside the classroom, influenced by culture, class, and gender (Egan-Robertson, 1998), contribute to the continual process of identity construction.

The stories of the students from three different U.S. settings can encourage educators to realize what a large impact their classrooms can have on students' developing identities as well as understanding the ways in which students play a role in shaping those contexts. Increased understanding of the ways in which students appropriate, resist, or transform classroom norms can remind us of the need to keep students as our primary focus. I believe that the students' stories offer educators a sense of hope that by providing students with many opportunities to express who they are through oral and written language, they will find spaces to create, reconstruct, and share their identities with others.

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143

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# Author Index

**A**

Abbott, J., 20, 131
Alvermann, D.E., 133
Anderson, E., 133
Anzaldúa, G., 12, 122, 131
Aronowitz, S., 6, 12, 86, 106, 123, 131
Assaf, L., 106, 135
Athaneses, S., 127, 131
Atwell, N., 25, 88, 131
Au, K., 17–18, 121, 127, 131

**B**

Bakhtin, M.M., 12–14, 29–30, 40, 58–59, 84, 95, 103, 114, 123, 131
Baquedano-Lopez, P., 15, 133
Belsey, C., 12–13, 131
Bernstein, B., 17, 131
Biggers, D., 106, 131
Blake, B.E., 16, 131
Borko, H., 19, 132
Bourdieu, P., 14, 109–111, 116, 132

**C**

Calkins, L.M., 17, 25, 31–32, 119, 123, 132
Canady, C., 19, 132
Cazden, C.B., 79, 117, 120, 132
Cherland, M.R., 16, 132
Cherry, R., 19, 132
Cochran-Smith, M., 121, 125, 132

Cohen, D., 6, 86, 132
Conrad, P., 9, 65–66, 136
Crawford, V., 12, 133
Cuban, L., 86, 132

**D**

Dahl, R., 66, 136
Delpit, L., 18, 110, 120, 125, 132
Dillon, D., 16, 113, 122, 132
Dressman, M., 14, 18, 29–30, 59, 110, 120, 132

**E**

Egan-Robertson, A., 12, 16, 130, 132
Eisenhart, M., 19, 132
Ellsworth, R.A., 18, 134
Emerson, C., 14, 132, 135
Erikson, E.H., 11, 132
Evans, K.S., 122, 132
Evans, R., 19, 132

**F**

Faigley, L., 19, 132
Fairclough, N., 15, 60, 98, 105, 109, 111–113, 116, 122–123, 126, 132
Fecho, B., 59, 114, 133
Ferdman, B.M., 19, 133
Finders, M.J., 16, 133
Foley, D., 14, 29, 112, 133
Freire, P., 124, 127, 133

**G**

Gee, J., 11–14, 40, 48, 58, 60, 72–73, 83, 85, 95, 99, 104, 113, 115, 121–123, 130, 133
Giroux, H.A., 6, 12, 86, 106, 109, 117, 123–124, 126, 129, 131, 133
Godley, A.J., 19, 134
Gonzalez, N., 127, 135
Guthrie, J.T., 18, 133
Gutierrez, K., 15, 30, 58–59, 113, 120–122, 126–127, 133

**H**

Hagood, M., 113, 129, 133
Harré, R., 29, 133

Harris, V.J., 18, 127, 133
Heath, S.B., 134
Holdaway, D., 19, 85, 104–105, 134
Holland, D., 14, 134
Holquist, M., 14, 134
Hudson, S.A., 20, 134
Hynes, M., 128, 134

J

Jacques, B., 73, 136
Jolliffe, D., 19, 132

K

Kear, D.J., 18, 134
Key, A., 73, 136
Krantz, S., 19, 132

L

Ladson-Billings, G., 127, 134
Larson, J., 15, 58, 133
Lemert, C., 14–15, 124, 134
Lemke, J.L., 14, 134
Lensmire, T., 18, 119, 128, 134
Levinson, B.A., 14, 134
Luke, A., 116, 134
Lytle, S., 121, 125, 132

M

Macedo, 124, 133
Mahiri, J., 19, 134
Mast, M., 106, 135
Matas, C., 97, 136
McCabe, A., 47, 134
McCarthey, S.J., 16, 61, 122, 129, 134
McKenna, M.C., 18, 134
McNeil, L., 122, 134
Mead, G.H., 12, 135
Merriam, S.B., 21–22, 135
Meyer, B., 121, 133
Michaels, S., 11, 46, 135
Mishler, E.G., 12, 124, 129–130, 135

Moje, E.B., 16, 113, 122, 129, 132, 134
Moll, L., 127, 135
Morson, G.S., 14, 135

**N**

Nieto, S., 125, 128–129, 135
Noddings, N., 122, 135

**P**

Patton, M., 22, 135
Penner, L.R., 66, 136
Phelps, S., 84, 135
Price, L., 82, 136

**R**

Reeves, N., 81, 136
Reyes, M. de la Luz, 98, 120, 126, 135
Rodino, A., 47
Routman, R., 17, 25, 119, 121, 135
Rymes, B., 15, 58, 133

**S**

Sailors, M., 106, 135
Sarup, M., 12, 61, 72, 79, 85, 103, 135
Shepard, A., 66, 136
Skinner, A., 19, 132
Sleeter, C., 121, 125, 135
Snyder, Z.K., 66, 80, 136
Soto, G., 91, 136
Spinelli, J., 88, 136
Street, B., 135

**T**

Tatum, B., 12, 135
Taylor, M., 88–89, 114, 136
Templeton, S., 19, 136
Tolkien, J.R.R., 35, 136
Turner, M.G., 15, 133
Tyack, D., 86, 132

**V**

Vygotsky, L.S., 136

**W**

Weaver, D., 84, 135
Weiler, J.D., 12, 136
Wertsch, J.V., 13–14, 136
Willis, A.I., 14, 18, 29–30, 120, 136
Worthy, J., 106, 135

**Y**

Yon, D.A., 11–12, 136
Young, J.P., 136

# Subject Index

Page references followed by *f* indicate figures.

A

ACCELERATED READING PROGRAM (TEXAS), 5

"ACES OVER THE PACIFIC" (GAME), 73

ACTIVITIES: classroom literacy, 64–65; writing workshop, 22–23

ADD (ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER), 100

*ADVENTURES IN LEGOLAND* (MATAS), 97

ADVENTUROUS TEACHING, 6

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: backgrounds of, 116, 127; Hillside School, Texas site, 24; NYC site, 23, 31; Valley School, Texas site, 26

*AIDA* (PRICE), 82

ALLEN, MS. (TEACHER), 24; reading-response sessions, 66–67

ALTERNATIVE SPACE, 59

ANALYSIS, 29–30

ANITA (NYC STUDENT), 40–49, 59, 61; background, 116; literacy practices, 41–48; resistance to classroom expectations, 110–113; teacher relationships, 117; writing conferences, 42–44; writing sample, 45–46

APPROPRIATION, 29; of classroom norms, 91–95, 108–110; in literature-based multiage classroom, 63–86; of norms, 63–86; in reading workshop and Reading Renaissance, 87–106; in Spanish and English, 68–73; in writing workshop, 33–40

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: NYC site, 31; Valley School, Texas site, 26

ASSIMILATION: process of, 13; of social discourse, 13–14, 29

ASSUMPTIONS, 124–126

ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD), 100

AUDIENCES, 128–129

AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSE, 14, 85

AVOIDANCE, 95–99

153

**B**

BACKGROUNDS, 116–117
*THE BAKER'S DOZEN* (SHEPARD), 66
BEHAVIOR, 73–79
BLENDING, 61
"BLOODY MARY," 76
BOOK SELECTION, 97–98; RR books, 93, 97–98
BOOKS, 65–68; Civil War, 73; Reading Renaissance (RR), 90; related tasks, 65–68; World War II, 73
BURTON, MS. (TEACHER), 24

**C**

CASE STUDIES, 21
CHOICE: book selection, 93, 97–98; providing real choices for real audiences, 128–129
CIVIL WAR GAMES AND BOOKS, 73
CLASHING, 61
CLASSROOM CONTEXTS, 117–124
CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS: making clear, 124–126; resisting, 110–113; transforming through text, 113–117
CLASSROOM LITERACY ACTIVITIES, 64–65
CLASSROOM LITERACY PRACTICES, 16–17
CLASSROOM NORMS: appropriating, 91–95, 108–110; appropriating in Spanish and English, 68–73; resisting through avoidance, 95–99; resisting through behavior, 73–79; transforming through fictional voice, 49–58; transforming through writing, 99–103
CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS: of activities during writing workshops, 22–23; Hillside School, Texas site, 24; New York City site, 22–23; Valley School, Texas site, 26
CLASSROOMS: example setting, 9–11; multiage, 63–86; power and language in, 15; student responses to, 30; that reflect third space, 15
CODES OF POWER, 125
COLORFUL LANGUAGE, 65
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK: Teachers College Writing Project, 21, 31–33, 60
COLUMBINE SHOOTINGS, 127; "Trenchcoat Man Massacre," 102
COMMUNITIES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE, 121
CONFERENCES: reading-response sessions, 66–67; writing conferences, 37, 42–44, 51–52, 54–55
CONGRUENCE, 30
CONTEXT: classroom, 117–124; influence on student identities, 2–3; social, 107–130

COUNTERSCRIPTS, 30

CULTURAL CAPITAL, 14

CURRICULUM: literature-based, 119–124; relating to student backgrounds, 126–128

D

DANIEL (VALLEY SCHOOL STUDENT), 99–103; background, 116; identity, 104; literacy practices, 101–103; mother, 99–101; as reader, 104; teacher relationships, 118; transforming expectations through text, 114–115; "Trenchcoat Man Massacre," 102; as writer, 101, 104; writing samples, 101–103

DATA COLLECTION: Hillside School, Texas site, 24; New York City site, 22–23; Valley School, Texas site, 26

DISCOURSES, 13; authoritative, 14, 85; double-voiced, 14; internally persuasive, 14, 30, 58, 103; primary, 13; single-voiced, 14; social, 13–14

DOUBLE-VOICED DISCOURSE, 14

E

*EATING THE PLATES* (PENNER), 66

*THE EGYPT GAME* (SNYDER), 66, 80, 82

ELLA (NYC STUDENT), 49–59, 61; background, 116; "The Case of the Dog de Menson," 49; "The Case of the Foggie Building," 49; literacy practices, 51–57; *Morris and Marsha, P.I.*, 49; teacher views of, 50; transforming expectations through text, 113–115; "The Vanishing Castle," 49; writing conferences, 51–52, 54–55; writing sample, 55–56

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) STUDENTS, 98; appropriating classroom norms in Spanish and English, 68–73

ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE-STUDY METHODS, 21

EUROPEAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: backgrounds of, 116; Hillside School, Texas site, 24; NYC site, 31; Valley School, Texas site, 26

EUROPEAN AMERICAN TEACHERS: Hillside School, Texas site, 24; Valley School, Texas site, 26

EXPECTATIONS: classroom, 110–113; making clear, 124–126; resisting, 40–49, 110–113; student interactions with, 29–30; teacher, 29–30, 40–49; transforming through text, 113–117

F

FICTION: by children, 50–51; "half truth-half fiction" writing, 114; Morris and Marsha, P.I. (Ella), 49; transforming classroom norms through, 49–58

*THE FORGOTTEN DOOR* (KEY), 73

**G**

GAMES, 73

GREG (HILLSIDE SCHOOL STUDENT), 73–79; background, 116; identity, 84–85; journal excerpts, 75–77; literacy practices, 76–78; resistance to classroom expectations, 110–113; teacher relationships, 117–118; as writer, 84–85

**H**

HABITUS, 14

"HALF TRUTH-HALF FICTION" WRITING, 114

HILLSIDE SCHOOL, TEXAS SITE, 23–25, 63, 122, 128; books and related tasks, 65–68; classroom literacy activities, 64–65; classroom observations, 24; parent interviews, 25; researcher's stance at, 28; student selection and data collection, 24; student work, 25; teacher selection and data collection, 24; teacher-student relationships, 117; writing workshop, 120–121

HYBRID TEXT, 59

HYBRID VOICE, 114

**I**

IDENTITY, 1–7; blending of, 61; clashing of, 61; construction of, 12–14, 130; definition of, 12–13; importance of, 70; literate, 72, 107–113; providing opportunities for exploring, 129–130; reconsiderations, 11–13; in theory, research, and practice, 9–30. *See also* student identities

IDEOLOGICAL POWER, 15

INNER SPEECH, 13

INSTRUCTION: literature-based, 17–19

INTERNALLY PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE, 14, 30, 58, 103

*INTO THE MUMMY'S TOMB'S* (REEVES), 81

INVISIBLE PEDAGOGIES, 16–17

**J**

*JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* (DAHL), 66, 71, 76, 82

JEFFREY (STUDENT), 128

JENNIFER (VALLEY SCHOOL STUDENT), 91–95; appropiation of classroom norms by, 108–109; identity, 104; literacy practices, 93–95; as reader, 104; RR book selection by, 93; teacher relationships, 118; as writer, 104

JOURNAL WRITING, 32, 34; notebook excerpts, 34; questions for, 90; rationale for, 32; response log excerpts, 80–82; student excerpts, 75–77, 102–103

JUSTICE, SOCIAL, 79–84, 102

**L**

LANGUAGE: in classroom, 15; colorful, 65; as "identity kit," 13; inner speech, 13; power and, 15; role in identity construction, 13–14

LATINO/A STUDENTS, 99; appropiation of classroom norms by, 109; backgrounds of, 116, 121; Hillside School, Texas site, 24; importance of identity as, 70; NYC site, 23, 31; Valley School, Texas site, 26

LE BLANC, MS. (TEACHER), 26, 87–88, 121; assumptions and expectations, 124; concerns about Reading Renaissance program, 91; fifth-grade language arts program, 88–89; goals, 89–90; reading workshops, 88–89; student relationships, 118; views of students, 94, 96, 101, 108

LEARNING: about students, 22

LETTER WRITING: student samples, 55–56, 97

LIMINAL SPACE, 59

LITERACY: assumptions about, 124–126; classroom activities, 64–65; classroom practices, 16–17; communities of effective practice, 121; home practices, 115–116; identity in, 9–30; maternal interest in, 101; student practices, 35–39, 41–48, 51–57, 69–72, 76–78, 80–83, 93–98, 101–103

LITERATE IDENTITIES, 72; students' constructions of, 107–113

LITERATURE-BASED CURRICULUM: teacher enactments of, 119–124

LITERATURE-BASED INSTRUCTION, 17–19

LITERATURE-BASED MULTIAGE CLASSROOMS, 63–86

LUCAS (VALLEY SCHOOL STUDENT), 95–99, 105–106; background, 116; book selection, 97–98; handwriting, 96; identity, 103–105; literacy practices, 96–98; as reader, 103–105; resistance to classroom expectations, 110–113; as writer, 103–105; writing samples, 97

**M**

MANDY (HILLSIDE SCHOOL STUDENT), 79–84; identity as writer, 84–85; literacy practices, 80–83; teacher relationships, 118; transforming expectations through text, 114–115

*MANIAC MAGEE* (SPINELLI), 88–89; journal questions for, 90

MARTIN, MS. (TEACHER), 24, 65; reading-response sessions, 67

MEYER, MS. (TEACHER), 31–33; assumptions and expectations, 124; identity of, 60; interviews with, 44–45, 50–51; notes to students, 34; student conferences, 34, 37, 42–44, 51–52; student relationships, 117; student views of, 37; views of students, 108; as "white middle-class gatekeeper," 111

MIGUEL (NYC STUDENT), 33–40, 59; appropiation of classroom norms by, 108–110; background, 116; interviews with, 37–38; literacy practices, 35–39; notebook excerpts, 34; teacher notes, 34; teacher relationships, 117; writing conferences, 37; writing sample, 38–39

*MORRIS AND MARSHA, P.I.* (ELLA), 49

MULTIAGE CLASSROOMS: literature-based, 63–86

**N**

NASA (NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION), 97
NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON TEACHER EDUCATION, 21, 135
NEW YORK CITY (NYC) SITE, 21–23, 31–61, 128; classroom observations, 22–23; researcher's stance, 27–28; student selection and data collection, 23; student work, 23; teacher selection and data collection, 22; teacher-student relationships, 117; writing workshop, 119–120
NORMS: appropriating, resisting, and transforming, 63–86; teacher, 29–30. *See also* classroom norms
NOTEBOOKS, 32, 34; rationale for, 32; response log excerpts, 80–82. *See also* journal writing

**P**

PARENT INTERVIEWS: Hillside School, Texas site, 25; Valley School, Texas site, 27
PATERSON, KATHERINE, 50
PEDAGOGY: invisible, 16–17
*PEDRO'S JOURNAL* (CONRAD), 9, 65–66, 81
PERSONAL INTERESTS: social justice, 79–84, 102; space interests, 97; war interests, 73–74, 76–77, 127
PORTFOLIOS, 71
POWER, 15; in classroom, 15; codes of, 125; ideological, 15; and language, 15
PRACTICE: identity in, 9–30; implications for, 5, 124–130

**R**

READERS: students as, 103–106
READING: reasons for, 94–95, 97–98; student views of, 19–20
READING RENAISSANCE (RR) PROGRAM, 87, 90, 111–112; books, 90; how students choose books, 93; influence of, 105; limitations of, 98; objections to, 88; refusal to participate, 97; teacher concerns about, 91
READING WORKSHOPS, 87–106
READING-RESPONSE SESSIONS: excerpts, 66–67
RECITING BY HEART, 13–14, 29
THE REDWALL SERIES (JACQUES), 73
RESEARCH: analysis and selection of cases, 29–30; classroom observations, 22–24, 26; identity in, 9–30; methods, 20–22; student selection and data collection, 23–24, 26–27; subquestions, 20; teacher selection and data collection, 22, 24, 26. *See also specific schools, sites*
RESEARCHER'S STANCE, 27–28
RESISTANCE, 29–30; through avoidance, 95–99; through behavior, 73–79; to classroom expectations, 110–113; to classroom norms, 73–79, 95–99; in literature-based multiage classroom, 63–86; to norms, 63–86; in reading

workshop and Reading Renaissance, 87–106; to teacher expectations, 40–49; in writing workshop, 31–61
RESPONSE LOGS: excerpts, 80–82
RETELLING IN ONE'S OWN WORDS, 13–14, 29
RITA (HILLSIDE SCHOOL STUDENT), 68–73; appropiation of classroom norms by, 108–110; background, 116; identity, 84–85; literacy practices, 69–72; portfolio evaluation, 71; teacher relationships, 117; as writer, 84–85; writing samples, 70
*ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY* (TAYLOR), 88–89, 94, 96, 114

**S**

SAMPLING: purposeful, 22
SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS, 98
SINGLE-VOICED DISCOURSE, 14
*THE SKIRT* (SOTO), 91
SOCIAL CONTEXTS, 107–130
SOCIAL DISCOURSE, 13–14; assimilation of, 29
SOCIAL JUSTICE, 82, 102; transformation through, 79–84
SPACE INTERESTS, 97
SPANISH: appropriating classroom norms in, 68–73. See also Latino/a students
SPEECH: inner, 13
STUDENT IDENTITIES: construction of, 12; context and, 2–3; developing as writers, 58–61; as readers, 103–106; reconstruction of, 30; as writers, 84–86, 103–106
STUDENT NOTEBOOKS: excerpts, 34; rationale for, 32; response log excerpts, 80–82. *See also* journal writing
STUDENT SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION: Hillside School, Texas site, 24; New York City site, 23; Valley School, Texas site, 26–27
STUDENT WORK: Hillside School, Texas site, 25; New York City site, 23; Valley School, Texas site, 27
STUDENTS, 126–128; backgrounds of, 116–117, 126–128; constructions of literate identities, 107–113; fiction writing by, 50–51; interactions with norms and expectations of teachers, 29–30; interviews excerpts, 37–38; learning about, 22; responses to classrooms, 30; social contexts, 107–130; teacher-student relationships, 117–119; views of reading and writing, 19–20
STUDENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES: reading-response sessions, 66–67; writing conferences, 37, 42–44, 51–52, 54–55

**T**

TAAS. *See* Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
TEACHER SCRIPTS, 30

TEACHER SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION: Hillside School, Texas site, 24; New York City site, 22; Valley School, Texas site, 26

TEACHERS: enactments of writing workshop and literature-based curriculum, 119–124; expectations of, 29–30, 40–49; norms of, 29–30; sample notes, 34

TEACHERS COLLEGE WRITING PROJECT, 21, 31–33, 60

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS, 117–119; reading-response sessions, 66–67; writing conferences, 37, 42–44, 51–52, 54–55

TEACHING: adventurous, 6; "against the grain," 121; example sessions, 9–11

TEXAS, 21

TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC SKILLS (TAAS) TEST, 64, 122; preparation for, 105–106

TEXAS SITES. *See* Hillside School, Texas; Valley School, Texas

TEXT: transforming expectations through, 113–117

THEORY, 9–30

THIRD SPACE, 113; classrooms that reflect, 15; development of, 59; establishment of, 30; unscripted, 15

TRANSFORMATION, 29; of classroom norms, 49–58, 99–103; of expectations, 113–117; through fictional voice, 49–58; in literature-based multiage classroom, 63–86; of norms, 63–86; in reading workshop and Reading Renaissance, 87–106; through social justice, 79–84; through text, 113–117; through writing, 99–103; in writing workshop, 31–61

**U**

UTTERANCES, 13

**V**

VALLEY SCHOOL, TEXAS SITE, 25–27, 87, 122, 128; classroom observations, 26; literacy program, 105; literature-based curriculum, 120; parent interviews, 27; as Reading Renaissance Model School, 88; researcher's stance at, 28; student selection and data collection, 26–27; student work, 27; teacher selection and data collection, 26; teacher-student relationships, 118

VENTRILOQUATION, 14

VIOLENCE, 76; Columbine shootings, 102, 127; war interests, 73–74, 76–77, 127; World Trade Center, 127

VOICE: fictional, 49–58; hybrid, 114

**W**

WAR INTERESTS, 73–74, 127; writing samples, 76–77

WORKSHOPS. *See* reading workshops; writing workshops

WORLD TRADE CENTER, 127

160

World War II, 73, 127
writers: student as, 58–61, 84–86, 103–106
writing: fiction, 50–51; "half truth-half fiction," 114; journal, 32, 34, 75–77, 80–82, 90, 102–103; letter, 55–56, 97; process approaches to, 1–2; student samples, 34, 38–39, 45–46, 55–56, 70, 75, 97, 101–103; student views of, 19–20; transforming classroom norms through, 99–103
writing conferences, 37, 42–44, 51–52, 54–55
writing workshops, 17–19, 90; appropriation in, 33–40; classroom observations of activities during, 22–23; components of, 17; NYC site, 31–61; resistance in, 31–61; teacher enactments of, 119–124; transformation in, 31–61

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